

THURSDAY, 23 JULY 2009

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Estimates Committee G Members

Mr SPA Wettenhall (Chair)
Mrs EA Cunningham
Mr JM Dempsey
Dr B Flegg
Mr MT Ryan
Mrs DC Scott
Mr MP Watt

In Attendance

Hon. GJ Wilson, Minister for Education and Training
Department of Education and Training
Ms J Grantham, Director-General
Mr A Wagner, Deputy Director-General, Infrastructure Services (Acting)
Ms Z Johnston, Chief Officer, Office of Early Childhood Education and Care
Mr A Black, Chief Financial Advisor
Mr R Camm, Associate Director-General, Skills Queensland

Committee met at 8.30 am

CHAIR: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee G open. On behalf of the committee, I welcome to the hearing the minister, departmental officers, officers of statutory bodies and members of the public. My name is Steve Wettenhall MP, member for Barron River and chair of the committee. Mrs Liz Cunningham MP, the member for Gladstone, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Mr Jack Dempsey MP, member for Bundaberg; Dr Bruce Flegg MP, member for Moggill; Mr Mark Ryan MP, member for Morayfield; Mrs Desley Scott MP; member for Woodridge; and Mr Murray Watt MP, member for Everton.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the areas set out in the order of appointment dated 3 June 2009. This morning the committee will examine the organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Training. The committee has agreed to a minor change to the original hearing program in relation to this portfolio, whereby the committee will primarily focus its attention on the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care in a one-hour block allocated at the end of the committee's consideration of the Department of Education and Training.

Following lunch, the committee will examine units within the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. The committee will adjourn proceedings for the following periods of time: morning tea from 10.30 am to 10.45 am, lunch from 12.45 pm to 1.45 pm, and afternoon tea from 4.15 pm to 4.30 pm.

The committee's proceedings are lawful proceedings and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Queensland parliament. Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings but may not participate otherwise. All present are asked to turn mobile phones off or into silent mode. In accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee.

The committee has resolved that audio and video recording of these proceedings by Parliamentary Service cameras and microphones shall be broadcast via the Parliamentary Service website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. Television film coverage and photography will be allowed during the chair's opening statements and the introductory statements of each minister as well as for a short period during each changeover of ministerial advisers.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that under standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute, answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each time limit. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions at today's hearing be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. For those reasons the time limits will be enforced strictly. Government members and non-government members will take turns asking questions, generally in blocks of 20 minutes, commencing with non-government members. The committee has resolved that non-committee members may be given leave to attend to ask questions during the hearing today. To assist Hansard, officers are asked to provide their names and positions prior to responding to a question referred by a minister.

I now declare open for examination the proposed expenditure for organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Training. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, under standing order 177, you are able to make an opening statement of no longer than five minutes.

Mr WILSON: Thank you, Mr Chair. I was very pleased when asked to take on the Education and Training portfolio after the last election. I know that education is the key to a child's success and what a profound and lasting impact it can have. I am passionate about ensuring that all Queensland children have access to a quality education. We are facing challenging, but exciting times in Education and Training. The Bligh government is driving major reforms in this area, because we want Queensland students to have the best and to be the best. We know that there is work to be done to ensure that our children receive the world-class education that they deserve. That is why we are continuing to boost our investment in this vital area. It is an investment in Queensland's future.

We are meeting our commitment to creating a smarter Queensland through a \$9 billion education budget, which is funding more new classrooms, more teachers, better education programs and more diverse learning opportunities than ever before. The key to achieving our goals is improving standards in our schools and this is the key element of our reforms. In my short time as minister, I have spoken to many principals, parents, teachers and students. The government values greatly the dedicated work of our principals and teachers. What they are telling me is that they want schools to be places where students are getting a solid grounding in the fundamentals of education from dedicated teachers working under strong leadership in an environment free from disruption. Parents want schools to set high standards for student achievement and behaviour. Principals and teachers want to feel supported in setting these high expectations. Students and their parents want to know that any help they need is available, whether it is dealing with behavioural issues, meeting special needs, or an extra push to boost their skills in literacy and numeracy.

Our top priority is sharpening the focus in schools on the fundamentals of education. Queensland's results in national literacy and numeracy testing were disappointing and it is clear some major changes are needed to address this. That is why we engaged Professor Geoff Masters to tell us how we can do better. We are now implementing his recommendations in a bid to reach our goal of improving literacy and numeracy standards in Queensland classrooms and have our students performing at the level of those in New South Wales and Victoria.

We are also setting high expectations of students when it comes to behaviour. I recently announced a state-wide review of student behaviour management to help stamp out bad behaviour that is disruptive to teaching and distracting students from learning. We want to give teachers and principals the backing they need to enforce those high standards and to take tough action when students fail to meet them. I have met with the Statewide Behaviour Committee and the group is now considering how we can give principals and teachers more tools to deal with this behaviour. Principals are already showing strong leadership on this issue, cracking down on bad behaviour as seen in the suspensions and exclusions data that we recently released for the first time at a school level. This type of leadership is the key to driving the major reforms we want to see in our schools.

I have made it very clear to principals that I want them to be the force behind the changes we need. As I told the annual conference of state school principals last month, we know that every school environment is different and that a one-size-fits-all approach is not the most effective. Principals know their school communities best, as do their staff and their students. They, as school leaders, are well

placed to understand what will help achieve our goals for the future of education in Queensland at their individual school. That is why one of our key reforms is empowering principals to develop and execute a strategy to improve teaching and learning at their school.

With this greater autonomy comes greater responsibility and higher expectations. We encourage principals to continue driving the state and national agenda for improved literacy and numeracy standards, more transparent reporting and quality teaching. As a government, we will provide guidance, training and support to our school leaders to help ensure that they have the necessary skills to rise to the challenge. One of the keys to good leadership is constantly examining what we do and how we do it. The government supports our school leaders—our principals—doing just that. Mr Chairman, my goal as education minister is to see real improvements in standards at Queensland schools and to meet our commitment to providing all students with a world-class education system.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister.

Mr WILSON: Mr Chairman, could I for the record draw to the attention of the committee a correction that needs to be made to an answer to a question on notice?

Leave granted.

Mr WILSON: I have been advised as of this morning—in fact, about 20 minutes ago—that the record needs to be corrected in regard to non-government question on notice No. 3. At the time the budget papers were being developed, all projects in the 2008-09 Capital Works Program were expected to be complete in that financial year. Three projects were, in fact, delayed into the 2009-10 financial year but do not appear in the Capital Works Program for the 2009-10 year as at that time they were expected to be completed. These three projects are a small proportion of the approximately 200 projects that I understand are set out in 2009-10. The three are Redlynch State College—there is a hall there. It was delayed due to converting the hall into a cyclone shelter. It is now due to be finished on the 31st of this month, so I am advised. Secondly, Redcliffe Special School—new classrooms. The area experienced adverse weather that caused construction delays and it is now expected to be completed in the remainder of this month. At Aviation High—the redevelopment of it—access to a trade training funding source gave the school the opportunity to revise the scope of the redevelopment and it is now due to be completed in August 2009. That is the correction of the record, Mr Chairman. I do apologise to the committee for that unintended error in responding to, I think, the honourable member for Moggill's question on notice No. 3. But I hope that clarifies the matter for the honourable member.

Dr FLEGG: Thanks, Minister.

CHAIR: At some convenient time may the minister wish to table that correction?

Mr WILSON: I will do that right at this moment.

CHAIR: Thank you.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, my first question is in relation to staffing, which is dealt with on page 3-108. In relation to teacher vacancies, you answered to the parliament in question on notice No. 563 that teacher vacancies were contained at a particular website address, which is in that answer. I have monitored that for some time. I will table what is present this morning on that. According to the website that you gave us in that answer, there are only around three permanent teaching positions advertised as being vacant. Do you stand by that answer as being a complete answer for teacher vacancies in Queensland? My concern, obviously, is that you do not have a clear picture of where your shortages and vacancies are. I will table those printouts from the website.

Leave granted.

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The teaching workforce of Education Queensland is highly valued by the government. We have increased the total number of teachers employed in the education sector, if my memory serves me right, by approximately 6,000 to 7,000 over the past eight to nine years. It is something in that order because we have been expanding the state education system in building new and better schools and we have also been expanding the teacher workforce because we have reduced class sizes progressively year after year after year, such that now P-3 has a class size of 25, 4-10 has a class size of 28 and 11-12 has a class size of 25.

In expanding employment in the state education system, we are looking for opportunities to employ more teachers wherever that is possible and not only more teachers wherever that is possible but more teachers in a permanent capacity rather than in a temporary capacity. I will ask my director-general to follow up on the detail of the question that you have asked. It may be that we need to get some particular advice from one of our officers here so that we can respond more fully to you at a later point.

Ms Grantham: The website would be accurate at a certain period of time. It identifies the permanent vacancies that are available. You would understand that there are a number of arrangements in place where we replace teachers or principals on leave with temporary arrangements. We cannot offer a permanent job to a person when the job is not vacant. So a job becomes vacant when a person leaves a position for a certain period of time—a longer period of time than 12 months.

Dr FLEGG: So there are only three permanent vacancies for teachers in the whole of Queensland.

Ms Grantham: There would be many temporary vacancies. That means that people have gone on some period of leave, whether it be maternity leave, long service leave, sick leave. Temporary vacancies can be filled with temporary people, but unless a person leaves a position permanently it does not become a permanent vacancy. At the beginning of the year a large number of offers are made for permanent placements for teachers where there are permanent vacancies created either through resignation or growth in enrolments, but we do not have permanent vacancies available at all times. I cannot confirm the accuracy of the information on the website at this time, but we will take it on notice and advise later within this session.

Dr FLEGG: With reference to the Every Child Counts program, which is referred to on pages 3-102 and 3-103, this program is in part aimed at attendance. I am very concerned about the issue of attendance. In answer to question on notice 1684 on Remembrance Day 2008, a list of attendance figures by region was published which does not actually show any education region having a particular problem with attendance. How are you identifying the attendance within schools and how good is your system to be able to identify the areas where there are problems given that they have not really been identified publicly to date?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. There is no doubt about it. All of the evidence shows that improved school attendance directly correlates to improved student achievement, improved student retention through the education system and therefore improved opportunities for students in adult life for employment and in the lives that they lead. So student attendance is very, very important and the government recognises that. That is why in October 2008 I think it was the department initiated the Every Day Counts program to raise a greater awareness amongst parents as well as amongst students—certainly it does need to be raised amongst the teaching population because they know the truth of what I was just saying—of the importance of every day indeed does count at school.

That is why publications like the ones that I can show the committee here have been prepared by the department and circulated to the schools and made available to parents to convey the important message—indeed, this is one big poster that has been put up at most schools, if not every school—and to raise the profile of this important drive and target. We want to make sure that we keep meeting our commitments. One of the most important commitments is to lift the standards of student achievement. Underpinning that is making sure that we campaign well, not just in October but at subsequent times, to lift the awareness of parents about the importance of students attending school not just most of the time but every day.

I have had discussions with my department about what opportunities there are to reinforce moving to a phase 2 of Every Day Counts to look at additional ways in which we can reinforce this message. I think you correctly identified—and you would embrace the importance of the principle that I commenced my answer with—

Dr FLEGG: I guess the question was more: do you have good figures on attendance?

CHAIR: Order! Member for Moggill, you have asked the question. The minister is entitled to answer.

Mr WILSON: I do not want any stone left unturned in examining practical, affordable, effective ways of lifting the level of student attendance. I have asked my department to examine that. In the short term we will be looking at some additional measures that we can take to improve, even beyond what it is now, school attendance. Any absence from school certainly unexplained and without good reason is unacceptable.

Dr FLEGG: With reference to page 3-102 of the SDS, there is an allocation of \$7.5 million in 2009-10 and \$15 million in 2010-11 to provide an extra \$10,000 to each school, with an \$3,000 extra to schools in disadvantaged areas. The SDS indicates that this is for all schools. Is this to all schools or just primary schools? Is this the federal money that was paid to the state at the rate of \$100 per head for each child in primary school?

Mr WILSON: That is a level of operational detail I will shortly have my director-general or some officer through the director-general respond to. Can I firstly say that the Masters report, which the government commissioned and it has been released—and we have adopted a preliminary six recommendations and there are five final recommendations—clearly identifies that we need to ensure that extra effort is put into literacy and numeracy and science teaching in schools not only in terms of professional development of teachers in those three disciplines but also in terms of the opportunities and the way in which students are learning in those three areas.

That is why we have committed \$72 million to a literacy and numeracy program that involves 80 literacy and numeracy coaches and also specialised teaching and targeted teaching for years 5 and 7. That is why we have put \$43 million into a Science Spark program, where we are going to engage another 100 primary science teachers and we are also going to engage 15 specialist science teachers for the professional development of primary school teachers in science.

So those two sums—\$72 million and \$43 million—have been put out there on the front line to be directed to the areas of greatest student need, because we are focused on meeting our commitments of lifting literacy, numeracy and science standards, especially for disadvantaged students in schools where the results from the NAPLAN testing tell us that there is a greater need for effort than there may be in other areas. I refer to my director-general at this point.

Ms Grantham: In relation to the aspect of the question relating to the school grant of \$10,000 and an additional \$3,000, the \$3,000, as you understand, is to disadvantaged areas but the \$10,000 is for all schools. It will be an increase in their school grant that is paid in January commencing 2010. In terms of the federal money, the \$100 per student will not go directly to a school based on a per capita basis because it has been allocated to support the priorities of increasing the outcomes for students in literacy and numeracy and science. So we have targeted that funding. It will still go to schools but we will target the manner in which it will go to schools.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, with reference to the State Schools of Tomorrow, doesn't your decision to close the Blackstone State School—despite its great discipline record, with only eight short suspensions; some of the best NAPLAN results, with every grade 3 student, for example, meeting standard; no asbestos; and modern sporting facilities built at a cost of \$300,000—based simply on the size of the school put every smaller school in this state under similar threat of closure?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Queensland government is investing a record amount of \$680 million in capital works in the education sector. It is investing a record amount of \$141 million in maintenance. Both sums were records last year and they are records this year in 2009-10. Those funds are being directed towards making sure that we have the best schools in the best locations providing the most diverse and comprehensive curriculum available for students.

In the Ipswich area, \$134 million is being spent over the next several years in building new schools and expanding existing schools. It is the case that, like what has happened with Blackstone State School and like what has happened with some other schools year after year—and indeed I suggest what also happened during the three years of the coalition government some years ago—the department identifies the best way in which to get the critical mass of student body in a particular area so that some schools are expanded and smaller numbers from a smaller school are transferred to that larger school so that they get the best breadth of curriculum exposure and the best breadth of exposure to the full range of specialised teachers. That is designed to achieve, and does indeed achieve, the best outcomes for students.

I am advised that the Blackstone State School has low enrolment numbers and they are not projected to increase significantly, and the school is located on a small site about half the size of a new primary school. The decision to close Blackstone State School, as you would well understand—made by very conscientious public servants engaged in this very challenging balancing act—was not made lightly and followed extensive consultation with the eastern Ipswich community and key stakeholders.

The community reference group that was established identified Blackstone and another school as the least sustainable within the cluster of schools. As I have indicated earlier with reference to the financial figures, multimillion dollar renewal work is underway for primary schools considered unsustainable in the long term, and that has enabled us to consolidate over time the cohort from those smaller schools into the bigger and expanded schools in that region for the benefit of the educational outcomes of those students.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to the BER and the Capital Statement, I note that a large amount of federal money is being spent on school halls, libraries, science labs et cetera. This will be a substantial increase in the capital stock for which the federal government is only paying capital construction costs. What additional funding will the state government be providing for the ongoing maintenance of this large increase in the number of school buildings or are these buildings going to be left to the local P&Cs to do the repairs and maintenance on?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question about the Building the Education Revolution. I am delighted that you have raised this program. It is an unprecedented funding program into new facilities in schools not just in Queensland but around the country. It is embraced by everyone in the Australian community except the Liberal and National Party in the federal parliament, who vigorously opposed it on the first vote when it went to the Senate as part of the \$42 billion stimulus package but eventually managed to see their way clear to not obstruct it any further. That funding of \$2.6 billion is coming into Queensland schools.

It is interesting that you raised this question because that funding program coming into this state was also argued against by the LNP in the Queensland parliament in February of this year—opposing the idea of the stimulus package. I am delighted to see that, despite the public opposition of the Liberal

and National parties to this program of expenditure in state schools, you have been a vigorous advocate at a local level of those very good schools that you have in your electorate—like the very good schools we have in other electorates—receiving the Building the Education Revolution funding. That is all despite you and your party's opposition in the parliament here and at a national level. For example, you wrote to my predecessor on 19 February urging that one of your significant schools be the beneficiary of whatever funds were available under the Building the Education Revolution.

Dr FLEGG: I would love to see schools get new buildings.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr WILSON: I commend you on your advocacy for your local schools, as we would expect from any good member of parliament, but it does fly in the face of your party's position within this parliament and your party's position within the federal parliament. Nonetheless, we are pushing on with meeting our commitments, not just with state funding to improve and expand facilities but also with federal funding. I will ask my director-general whether there is a departmental officer available who may be available to respond to the particular of the question you have asked, if not now then later in this session.

Ms Grantham: I will just cover it generally. As new school buildings are built, they then form part of our capital maintenance program in an ongoing way, and the maintenance money that is scheduled across schools would be used and applied to any new building that the Commonwealth may have funded through the BER program.

Mr WILSON: Indeed, as you would be aware, that happens with any other facility that is on school property.

CHAIR: The first period of questioning allocated to non-government members has expired. I call the member for Everton.

Mr WATT: Minister, could you please provide some more information to the committee on the record capital expenditure program which has been described on page 43 of your department's Capital Statement?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to building a better education system and creating Queensland jobs through our record \$1.467 Education capital works program this financial year. This budget delivers: \$149 million to construct a brand-new Amberley State School, undertake staged work at five schools, make land acquisitions and provide additional classrooms at existing schools; \$100 million to replace and enhance existing facilities; \$301 million for the Tomorrow's Schools program; and \$43.7 million to make our schools cleaner and greener through our school's solar and energy efficiency program. We are also investing more than \$148 million in maintenance in 2008-09—\$126.1 million for schools and \$22.4 million in teacher housing.

The 2009-10 budget provides \$1.168 billion to deliver the Building the Education Revolution program, which represents an unprecedented investment by the Commonwealth government in Queensland schools, as I earlier alluded to. It is a breath of fresh air for a Commonwealth government to get involved in our schools in such a positive way. It marks a clear departure from the immediate predecessors during their 12 years in federal government.

It is so positive in fact that the shadow minister, as I indicated earlier, wrote to me in that letter of 19 February to acknowledge the work the Rudd government is doing and what the Howard government should have done, by implication, for schools during its long and, I regret to say, lifeless tenure in regard to support for schools and their capital works. After all, they are all taxpayers in Queensland—the taxes just go to two different places—so Queenslanders are entitled to get the full taxpayer benefit from the funds going to the federal government.

I am sure the honourable member for Moggill as well as others would welcome the announcement in this budget for the schools in his electorate, which are among the finest in this state. As you are no doubt aware, Dr Flegg, Kenmore State High School will receive \$7.665 million in the budget towards the stage 1 redevelopment and a further \$423,000 towards planning for the stage 2 redevelopment. Moggill State School will also receive \$365,000 for a multipurpose hall. These are unheard of figures from any previous administration in Queensland. Dr Flegg, you are entitled to be jumping up and down, running up and down the main streets of your electorate, as any other member would be, shouting to the rooftops at how delighted you are with the support of the Rudd Labor federal government for your electorate.

This funding would not have been possible had the LNP come to office in March. Have we forgotten already that they very going to scrap the State Schools of Tomorrow program? They were going to scrap the balance of the \$850 million of funding for state schools. What would have happened under the LNP government is that the education funding would have been cut by three per cent, over 3,000 staff would have lost their jobs—meaning 3,000 fewer teachers—we would have had fewer new classrooms, fewer teacher aides and fewer training and apprenticeship places.

Mrs SCOTT: With reference to page 3-102 of the SDS, could the minister please inform the committee how the rollout of the Building the Education Revolution is going? What level of support does it have in the community?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know how supportive you are, Mrs Scott, of the Building the Education Revolution and this unprecedented investment in Queensland schools. The Bligh government is working closely with our federal colleagues to ensure the maximum number of Queenslanders benefit from the Rudd government's BER funding. The Bligh government is focused on meeting its commitments to deliver this funding on behalf of the Australian government. As I have said, the total package of funding into Queensland equates to about 20,000 jobs. This investment will stimulate the economy and benefit all Queensland students, also providing local workers with jobs and local companies with new business in communities all over Queensland. But, regrettably, if those on the other side of the chamber and their Canberra colleagues had their way, as I was saying earlier, not a single Queenslander would see the benefits of this new infrastructure spending—no new jobs, no new classrooms, no new resources.

The shadow minister has been one of the most vocal critics of the BER program in campaign strategy No. 2. Campaign strategy No. 1 part (a) was the opposition to this program in the federal parliament. Part (b) of campaign strategy No. 1 was the opposition to it in the state parliament. Now we are in campaign strategy No. 2 where he is trying to identify all of its imperfections and therefore tarnish the name of this good program. The shadow minister has railed against the wastefulness of providing schools with brand-new halls and libraries but, unfortunately, they keep getting the facts wrong. There were claims that the state government is siphoning off 20 per cent of funds in fees and charges. Well, that is wrong. All the money ends up in the hands of local businesses working on these construction projects, just as it was intended to.

The member's tune, as I said, changed considerably when it came to schools in his own electorate. I am happy that he is a cheerleader for those schools. I indicated earlier that the previous minister received correspondence from the member for Moggill urging that as much Building the Education Revolution funding as possible be made available to the schools in his area. I congratulate him, as I said, for coming on board and being a vigorous advocate for the schools in his electorate. Kenmore State High School have, as I have already said, taken advantage of this unprecedented opportunity offered by the government. They have already benefited to the tune of \$200,000 under the National School Pride program. They are rolling in cash at Kenmore State High School; there is no doubt about it. The Rudd government and the Bligh government are looking after the parents and the students in the electorate of Moggill.

Mr RYAN: Good morning, Minister. Can you please explain how the government will respond to the Masters report?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member very much for the question. I will just complete what I was saying earlier for the information of the committee. As a matter of interest, in the electorate of Moggill there are nine schools that will benefit to the tune of more than \$20 million with education infrastructure. So we are very proud to be delivering more than 4,000 projects at Queensland schools. That is more than \$1.1 billion in this financial year.

Now on to one of the most groundbreaking reports received in education for a long time, and that is Professor Masters's report. Queensland's results in national literacy and numeracy testing last year—the first year of national testing—were very disappointing and it was clear that major changes were needed to address this. That is why we engaged Professor Masters to tell us how best we might do this. Professor Masters, the CEO of the Australian Council for Education Research, a highly reputable organisation that has been going for 30 or more years, conducted an extensive review of Queensland primary education to identify ways to improve levels of literacy, numeracy and science achievement in Queensland primary schools. Professor Masters provided five final recommendations. These recommendations are a road map to help us reach our goal of improving literacy, numeracy and science standards in Queensland. We are now implementing these recommendations in a bid to reach our goal of improving literacy and numeracy standards in Queensland classrooms. We want to be up there with our students performing at the level of those in New South Wales and Victoria.

Graduate teachers will undergo rigorous testing to ensure their numeracy, literacy and science teaching skills—their teaching skills—are up to scratch. Parents have the right to know that their children's teachers have the best possible knowledge and teaching skills. Under this plan, all new primary teachers will need to show that they can effectively teach these critical learning areas before they are registered. The test will be developed and administered by the Queensland College of Teachers. We will work closely with the universities to ensure students entering the teaching courses—that is, right at the point of entry—are tested on their literacy, numeracy and science knowledge to identify over the term of the four-year degree any gaps in learning very early on so that obviously additional support can be given to those students. We want all of those students in the education faculties to succeed.

These are major changes and some will be controversial—this one in particular—but the government is committed to taking any steps necessary to give Queensland's students the best possible education. In the state budget, we committed to providing 80 literacy and numeracy coaches and 100 extra science teachers, we will deploy 15 Science Spark trainers, and we will also establish a \$3.6 million Queensland Education Leadership Institute to provide school leaders with the skills and training they need to help drive these major reforms.

CHAIR: Minister, given the increasing demands and expectations from parents and families of children with disabilities to provide appropriate educational support and services, can the minister advise what the Bligh government is doing about ensuring that their needs are being addressed?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. We are committed to meeting our commitments and providing all Queensland students with a quality education. The state school system caters for students with a wide range of educational needs, including students with a disability. That is because it is a universal education system available for everyone who wants to knock on the door of a state school. There are more than 17,800 students with disabilities attending Queensland state schools, and we are meeting our commitment to these students by investing more than \$395 million in 2009-10 on an array of programs and services to ensure they get the help and support they need in a variety of settings.

This can range from providing extra help in a mainstream school classroom to full support in a special school setting. We are improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities with \$8.2 million in capital works to improve special schools and an additional \$3.6 million for facilities for students with a disability in state schools, providing 16 additional classrooms in special schools for estimated increases in enrolments and investing \$9 million to upgrade three special schools through State Schools of Tomorrow projects. That is the initiative that the LNP would have cut had it won at the state election.

In 2009 all education regions received increased resource allocations totalling over \$10 million to support students with disabilities through the employment of 90 additional full-time equivalent teachers and 2,174 teacher aide hours—a truly remarkable achievement, particularly given the current economic climate. The level of support depends upon the needs of each child, of course, and that is always the paramount consideration. Every child is different. We do not use a one-size-fits-all model because we are committed to working with parents and education experts to devise an education program that meets the needs of students with disabilities. These resources are allocated based on assessments by professionals and are validated by teachers with classroom and curriculum experience and who have worked with students with disabilities.

The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to the welfare of these students. Around 8.4 per cent of our education budget is dedicated to the provision and delivery of special education services and support and we want to underline how important this area of education is.

Mr WATT: I refer the minister to page 3-105 of the SDS and the solar and energy efficiency program delivering solar panels to 100 Queensland schools, and I ask the minister if he could update the committee on this initiative.

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for this question. This is an area of particular continuing interest of mine, having formerly been the minister for mines and energy. I do know that the member for Everton has had a strong interest in championing the environment, both in his current capacity and in previous lives. The solar and energy efficiency program will see solar panels and energy-efficient lighting installed in schools across the state. In this financial year the Bligh government will invest \$43.7 million and complete more than 590 further schools under this program. More than 400 jobs are expected to be created state-wide, meaning this investment is good for the environment and the economy, creating green jobs for Queenslanders.

In fact, while the SDS reports that we were expected to deliver this program in 100 schools in 2008-09, I am delighted to inform the committee that we have actually delivered 122 schools with new solar panels and 131 schools with modern, energy-efficient lighting. In the Everton electorate, the Albany Hills State School and the McDowall State School were completed last year and are now utilising this new technology. Indeed, I was pleased to join the former minister for education and training in my former role as minister for mines and energy in launching the trial at the Albany Hills State School.

But it is not just in the electorate of Everton that we are delivering. Schools in electorates like Gladstone, Woodridge and Morayfield have also been amongst the first to benefit from the program. It does not stop there. I am sure the member for Moggill will join me today in recognising this fabulous investment in schools in his electorate. I understand that Kenmore State School, Pullenvale State School and Mount Crosby State School all had their solar and energy-efficient lighting installed well ahead of schedule. Of course, all schools in the state will benefit from this new technology by the end of the program.

The benefits of the program are numerous. It will reduce the electricity bill of every state school in Queensland, saving taxpayers millions of dollars every year. A proportion of each school's savings will go back to the school to encourage even greater energy savings. It provides the perfect opportunity for

teachers and students to engage in science and mathematics by providing them access to real-life data that is directly pertinent to their school. What better example of 21st century learning could you ask for? More than 20,000 tonnes of CO₂ are expected to be saved across Queensland state schools every year once the program is complete.

While the opposition party still seems to struggle to come to terms with the idea that climate change is real and is a problem we need to deal with, the Bligh and the Rudd Labor governments have teamed up to add further benefits to Queenslanders out of this and other programs. This program is steaming ahead and is on track to be completed in June 2011 as per the Bligh government's commitment.

Mrs SCOTT: With reference to page 3-103 of the SDS and the Computers for Teachers program, could the minister please inform me how this exciting initiative is rolling out?

Mr WILSON: Thank you very much, Mrs Scott, for that question. This is an important area of improving the schooling experience of our students. We are meeting our commitment to provide laptop computers to every permanent state school or TAFE teacher who works two or more days a week. In fact, the computers are currently rolling out ahead of schedule, with over 30,000 delivered to over 1,000 schools and TAFE campuses.

In this digital age, computers have replaced blackboards and chalk as the tool of trade for our teachers. As part of the digital generation, most of today's students use computers and other technology as their primary means of communicating with friends and family. That is why the government is investing \$70 million up-front in this important initiative. We want to equip our teachers with the most up-to-date technology so that they can teach our students in relevant and meaningful ways.

These laptops and the associated professional development will ensure that our local teachers are well equipped to teach our students. The program is well on track to be completed by June 2011. It covers not only procurement of laptops but also teacher training and basic school wireless network infrastructure.

The program has been received well by principals and teachers. Teachers in the Moggill electorate, I understand, to date have received 290 laptops at a cost of \$325,000. I hasten to add that I am sure many, many other electorates are getting the benefits, illustrated by what is going into the Moggill electorate. I do not want other honourable members to think that it is only the Moggill electorate that is benefiting from the Rudd and Bligh government. For example, in the electorate of Barron River 333 laptops have been issued at a cost of over \$360,000; in Everton 325 laptops have been provided at a cost of \$395,000; teachers in Morayfield have received 441 laptops at a value of \$442,000; and Woodridge teachers were happy to receive the 585 computers worth more than \$640,000. I have not forgotten the honourable member for Gladstone: last but not least, teachers in the Gladstone electorate have received 497 laptops worth more than \$540,000.

It is not only new computers they are receiving; every teacher is also receiving professional development to equip them with the skills needed to get the most out of the 21st century technology in their classroom. Every school is also equipped with wireless internet technology and teachers are now, I am pleased to say, able to work where and when it most suits them.

CHAIR: The time for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you, Mr Chairman. In relation to maintenance budgets, page 3-101 for the current year and page 3-105 for the previous year, I am concerned about the maintenance of asbestos flooring in our schools. Can you tell the committee, when one of your schools reports its asbestos flooring to be in poor condition, what would be the appropriate response to that and what time frame should the school expect to receive a response?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Undoubtedly the safety of our students and our teachers is paramount in our schools. That is why, across a whole range of areas, we ensure there is an appropriate approach taken at a school level, as well as at a system level, to deliver on that obligation that the system does have to make sure that we maximise the safety of students and teachers.

As you would know, asbestos has been an issue that is being addressed on a number of fronts in our schools. Indeed, several years ago there was a very, very big push to replace asbestos roofing on schools.

Dr FLEGG: I remember.

Mr WILSON: I thought you might have some vague recollection of this issue. If my memory serves me right, about \$90 million has been spent on replacing virtually all of the asbestos roofs in Queensland schools, seven years ahead of schedule. I think that is a good illustration of the commitment that the government does have to dealing with this very difficult and sensitive issue.

As you would be aware, in relation to asbestos in other parts of structures—in materials in the walls and flooring where asbestos is found—it is actually embedded in the product itself. Technical advice to government, which is also technical advice to the private sector, is that whilst the asbestos remains fixed in the product and not airborne then it is safe. But, of course, strategies need to be in place to address it where, indeed, there is some fracture to the wall or to the flooring.

In the case of asbestos backed flooring and the replacement program that you referred to, 122 vinyl flooring replacement projects were completed in 2008-09 in 92 schools with a budget allocation of \$4.3 million. The department policy directs that asbestos product removal work is undertaken on weekends and at times when staff and students are not present. The flooring that does contain asbestos continues to be managed in accordance with the government's Asbestos Management and Control Policy for Government Buildings. Health and safety, as I said, is the first priority. The floors are assessed, and where floors are assessed as being in a poor physical state then action is taken to address them.

There is a further \$6 million allocated from the department's maintenance program to validate the further 429 flooring projects at 269 schools in this coming financial year and to replace asbestos-containing vinyl material flooring as a priority as required.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, I table photos taken last week in classrooms and the administrative area of Chapel Hill State School. The deteriorating, holed and lifting flooring is listed on the school's asbestos register and the appalling state of it was reported in 2007. The school, expecting asbestos removal, was shocked when two men from Property Services turned up and taped over the holes and lifting edges. Clearly numerous taped holes and lifting edges can be seen and there are many lifting edges, I can tell you, Minister, that have not been taped. Is this an appropriate response? Is it acceptable to have left this in this sort of condition since 2007? Given that the administration of your maintenance budget is so poor and the response is so inadequate, how do you explain this to the P&C, parents and teachers?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. I reiterate that the safety of staff and students in our schools is our first priority.

Dr FLEGG: Do you want to have a look at it?

Mr WILSON: I reiterate that the safety of students and teachers in our schools is a first priority. There is a management system operated at several levels within the department in managing the issue.

Dr FLEGG: Have a look. It is not working.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr WILSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. There is an established policy and risk management strategy that is pursued by the department in addressing the need to replace asbestos in any material, let alone in the flooring material. As you would well understand, the particular matter that you have just raised is a matter of a detailed operational nature and is not one that ordinarily you would expect to be within the personal knowledge of me as minister. But I hear what you say. I will have an officer of my department look at the materials you were referring to just now and I will have them provide the director-general with some further information in response to the particular matter that you have raised.

I am presently advised by my director-general that service providers as a priority have to ensure that all maintenance and construction work that is carried out is done in a way that does not compromise students and staff. I am noting the point that you have just raised. Where schools report damage to asbestos-containing material or where they are suspected then arrangements need to be made and it is set up such that arrangements are made with the Department of Public Works to immediately carry out remediation works until longer term solutions are in place.

If that has not happened on this occasion, which we will examine, then that would be disappointing because we do indeed treat seriously the issue of safety. We have high expectations—we have high standards—and I as minister expect that they will be met by departmental officers in my department or by working in collaboration with the Department of Public Works and its people. The government has high expectations. We expect them to be met around issues of safety.

In relation to the details that you have raised I will ask, through the director-general, one of my officers to provide further advice should we be able to do so in the time frame of this session this morning.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, I refer you to page 3-103, the fifth dot point, and the \$113 million for Computers in Schools under the Commonwealth government's Digital Education Revolution funding for 2009-10. Out of that \$113 million how many computers will be purchased and how much of that money will actually go towards buying computers? In particular, I want to know how many computers and how much of that money will be held back for other purposes?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Computers in Schools is a key initiative of the federal government and the state government directed towards creating 21st century quality schooling in our state schools because we want the best for our students; we want to lift the

standard of achievements of our students. That is why we are investing heavily in this initiative and jointly with the federal government, because we understand that parents and students expect the best education they can get within our state school system. We want modern teaching environments.

The federal government funding for computers for students at school will all be dedicated to providing those computers to those students in those schools. There are essentially two parts to the program. One part is the funding that is available to actually provide the computers themselves and the second part is the funding that is available to be directed towards the cost of infrastructure and on-costs associated with the uptake of those computers in schools such as rewiring the school, setting it up in a wireless capacity—that sort of thing. Both tranches of funds are dedicated and will all be spent on putting the laptops in the hands of students and upgrading the infrastructure at the schools either by work that is done at the schools or work that is done across the education system.

In relation to the particular detail that you are asking—my director-general has been able to give me some particular details. The \$113 million being provided by the federal government is under the guidelines—the federal government has allocated \$2,500 for each additional computer on the basis of \$1,000 for the computer and \$1,500 for the on-costs. The schools will receive \$1,000 per computer and \$560 per device for on-costs. The remaining \$960 per device for on-costs is being delivered to the schools through centrally managed school ICT services.

CHAIR: Does the minister seek an extension?

Mr WILSON: Yes, I do, if I may.

CHAIR: Do you consent, member for Moggill?

Dr FLEGG: Yes.

CHAIR: Please continue.

Mr WILSON: The \$113 million provided by the federal government will be allocated using the federal government's guidelines as follows: direct to the schools, \$70 million; centrally managed programs, \$43 million. I want to emphasise here for the benefit of the member who has asked the question but also for members of the committee in particular that all of this funding will be spent on either delivering the computers to the schools or supporting their capacity. It will be spent, so I am advised, in accordance with federal government guidelines, not guidelines that in particular have been generated in Queensland or any of the other states; it is being delivered, I am advised, consistent with the federal government guidelines that attach to the expenditure of these funds. We are happy to do that because we want the funds to support the uptake of computers for kids in schools.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to the BER and the other associated federal funding, which is to construct a once-in-a-generation splurge on school halls, libraries, science labs and supplying computers, I am concerned about the staffing of these facilities. How many additional librarians, PE teachers, lab and IT support people and science staff will be employed to occupy, work in and utilise these new facilities?

Mr WILSON: I must say that I am extremely disappointed by that question. I am extremely disappointed by the tone of that question, the repetition of the negative attitude or the contradictory attitude towards this unprecedented funding going into Queensland schools. You talk about a splurge of funding going to facilities not only in your own electorate but also in other electorates as if it does not merit being done in the first place, is not being done for a thoughtful and good reason—

Dr FLEGG: I rise to a point of order, Mr Chairman. That certainly is not what either I said or can be inferred by what I said.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. Please continue, Minister.

Mr WILSON:—or that it is not being done and managed in the best possible way to deliver two outcomes: firstly, to protect and create jobs in Queensland as quickly as possible as part of the economic stimulus package to ameliorate the worst impacts of the global financial crisis—the other singular global event that the opposition has not come to terms with, the companion to climate change—and, secondly, to provide first-class educational facilities in every school throughout the state, and we welcome this. I do express my sincere disappointment about the tone and attitude that you continue to display to this unprecedented funding going into our Queensland schools.

We are wanting to meet our commitments. We understand that the state education system in Queensland is expanding apace. I am advised that around 350 extra teachers will be employed this year to ensure that we maintain some of the lowest class sizes in the country as our school enrolments increase. Those new teachers and new teacher aides will be across the whole range of different disciplines, both in the primary school setting and in the high school setting, to make the best use of these new facilities. I was recently at the opening of the Highland Reserve State School on the Gold Coast near Coomera. That is a world-class primary school with 700 students able to attend there. It has ICT built into it—27 kilometres of ICT material.

CHAIR: Order! The time has expired for answering that question.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to your proposal to conduct summer schools for years 4 to 7 for around 9,000 students, noting the comments by Professor Masters that there has been a recent decline in literacy and numeracy levels and also noting that 9,000 is only a fraction of those who have not reached benchmark, I ask: given that students failing to reach benchmark are much more likely to be the disengaged students, the poor attenders and among the thousands who are suspended each year, how do you propose to get these students—and they are the ones in most need—motivated to attend during their school holidays, and will failing to meet benchmark in that plan be a requirement of entering the summer schools?

Mr WILSON: Thank you for the question and thank you for drawing attention to the groundbreaking report by Professor Masters into the way in which we can more sharply focus upon lifting the student achievement levels for literacy, numeracy and science in our Queensland state education system. Make no mistake about it, that is what we are focused on doing. If one reads his report, it clearly identifies that there is no silver bullet—a bit like climate change—to use Al Gore's expression, but in a totally different setting. There are many things that we need to be doing, and the summer schools is simply one of them.

We will be, as I spoke about earlier, introducing preregistration testing for teachers in several years time. We will also be investing more in the professional development of the existing teachers around literacy, numeracy and science. We are also setting up the education leadership institute and we are also investing \$72 million in literacy and numeracy coaching for the 80 coaches and related work, including the summer schools, and also the \$43 million in the Science Spark initiative. The summer schools have been recognised by Professor Masters as a worthwhile initiative being directed in the way that it is. However, no-one has said that that is a panacea. What we are doing for the first time in Queensland, I am told, is organising these summer schools. So we are devising—and arrangements are underway now—a plan to enable us to carry out our first summer schools in September of this year.

We will learn a lot about this first phase—September—about how we can finetune that and move on to the subsequent phases into the Christmas-New Year period. But it has been recognised that this is a worthwhile project to undertake.

What we are wanting to do is target as many students who are most in need—but many students are in need, it would appear from the 2008 NAPLAN results—and would benefit from the targeted and intensive literacy and numeracy instruction that will come through the summer school. We have a range of approaches to make sure that over time—this is not a one day wonder—we pursue meeting our commitments.

CHAIR: Order! The minister's time has expired. The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Mr RYAN: Minister, I note that COAG recently set some ambitious targets to close the gap in relation to Indigenous education outcomes. Minister, please inform the committee what the Queensland government is doing to reach these targets.

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. COAG has committed to a national Indigenous reform agenda as part of the overall COAG changes and requested that all governments commit to meeting these targets. Isn't it wonderful with this federal Labor government through the COAG process that we are getting a lot sharper focus and action around nationally significant policy challenges, and the Indigenous area is one?

The six COAG Closing the Gap targets are to close the gap in life expectancy within a generation, halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade, ensure all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years, halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade, halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment by 2020 and halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The Queensland government is committed to these targets. In education we are meeting our commitment through the recently released Closing the Gap Education Strategy. The strategy sets ambitious goals but we need to set the bar high not just for the Indigenous community but also for Queensland students. These targets will be tough to meet but we are committed to improving Indigenous student outcomes.

That is why we are narrowing the focus to these three areas where we can make the most difference. We aim to halve the gap in year 3 reading and numeracy by 2012, close the gap in student attendance by 2013 and close the gap in year 12 retention by the 2013. The year 3 target students are those now entering prep. Early intervention is the key and that is why we are targeting these students early. We will focus on year 12 attendance and retention targets as well to get kids to school and keep them there. This is critical if we expect to achieve these COAG targets. Every community has different needs and our school-specific strategy recognises this.

We are moving towards empowering and encouraging regional directors and principals to implement this strategy and what will work best in their area. It is important to underline that the education department's Closing the Gap Education Strategy is setting down the stepping stones that the

department is going to pursue to help us meet the COAG targets. To use a different metaphor, it is setting down the building blocks that will help us launch into achieving these longer term targets that are ambitious. The education department's targets are ambitious, as are the longer term targets. Why should we not have ambitious targets, particularly for Indigenous education?

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 3-116 and the number of VET qualifications completed. Is the government on track to meet its Q2 target which aims for three out of four Queenslanders between the ages of 25 and 64 to hold a certificate III or higher qualification?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for this question. The Bligh government knows that education and training is the key to success for Queensland's young people. We want our school leavers to have every possible opportunity available to them, whether that is attending university, gaining an apprenticeship or undertaking other training.

It is part of the Bligh government's long-term vision for the future of Queensland to have three out of four people holding a trade, training or tertiary qualification by 2020. I am pleased to announce that we are on track to meet this target, based upon current figures. Achieving the Q2 target requires an average growth rate of 4.4 per cent in certificate III or above course completions over the period to 2020.

Queensland's growth year on year for 200-09 was well beyond that at 17 per cent. The number of course completions for certificate III and above has jumped from 52,628 in 2007-08 to 61,747 in 2008-09. Enrolments in certificate III and above are also on the increase. Queensland enrolments increased from 2007-08 by 7.3 per cent compared to the national rate of 5.8 per cent. Across the VET sector Queensland is punching well above its weight.

These figures show that we are performing strongly in enrolments and completions, putting Queensland on track to meet its Q2 target. We know that these figures are likely to fluctuate in the coming years with the impact of the global economic crisis, but our state's strong showing puts us on a good footing to minimise the effects and maintain our target.

The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to reaching this goal by continuing to invest in apprentices and trainees. We know that these vulnerable workers are among the first to go in a financial crisis and they need our support. That is why we took some tough decisions in this year's budget. That is why we have maintained our \$18 billion building program. That is why we are meeting our commitment to create jobs for Queenslanders. About 127,000 jobs have been protected or created out of that \$18 billion program.

Queensland is still building, so we need the next generation of apprentices and trainees learning their trades now to keep us on the front foot when the economy recovers. That is why we will invest more than \$203 million in this financial year to fund a range of training initiatives that will support existing apprentices and trainees and create further commencements this year. During the next three years the government will create 165,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships, in addition to the 90,000 existing positions that we are currently supporting.

Mr WATT: With reference to TAFE facilities, which are referred to on page 3-116 of the SDS, what is the government doing to improve current facilities? Where does the government plan to build new TAFE facilities?

Mr WILSON: The government, as I have said many times, has had to make some tough choices to maintain our \$18 billion building program and to keep our infrastructure programs going. It is about jobs. As highlighted by Budget Paper No. 3, some \$136 million will be invested in training infrastructure in 2009-10. That will support our 165,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships.

Our construction and modernisation of TAFE facilities is supporting the training and skills development that will drive our economy into the future. But these infrastructure programs are not just about buildings; they are about investing in the greatest asset of our state—our people. They will create jobs and provide modern teaching and learning environments.

The investments include nearly \$30 million, for example, for the Coomera Education Precinct for the Gold Coast Institute of TAFE. The Coomera Education Precinct will deliver world-class training for the film and television industry locally, nationally and internationally. The campus design has provision for two commercial-quality theatre auditoriums, digital video editing suites and production control facilities, music rehearsal studios, private recital rooms and an industry standard recording studio.

The \$22.2 million for the trade and technician skills campus in Townsville is another example. This new campus will offer training across the automotive, engineering, building and construction, plumbing and electrical trades. It will be located within an industrial precinct to help increase collaboration between industry and training programs. The tender process for the construction of the facilities commenced in late January 2009 and construction works are now underway.

Other major investments include \$9.1 million for the redevelopment of the Nambour campus of the Sunshine Coast Institute of TAFE and \$6.2 million for the redevelopment of Cairns campus of Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE.

As well as the investment in TAFE facilities we are investing \$301 million in 2009-10 in the State Schools of Tomorrow program to renew and upgrade facilities in Queensland schools. We will invest more than \$33 million for new kindergarten and child-care services. We are rolling out the federal government's BER program. The funding for BER is an unprecedented investment, as I have said many times before, in the future of Queensland's education system and in our state's economy. It is a great opportunity for our primary schools, P-12 schools and special schools across the state to create new libraries, new multipurpose halls and new classrooms. Importantly, it will create local jobs for local contractors at a time when Queenslanders need them most.

Mrs SCOTT: I refer to the SDS at page 3-116 and the number of apprentices in training. Minister, what is the Bligh government doing to ensure that the number of apprentices increases so that we have sufficient skills for when the economy recovers?

Mr WILSON: Thank you, Mrs Scott, for a question on this very important area. There is no doubt we are facing tough economic times. We know that from our own electorates. Mrs Cunningham knows that Gladstone particularly is well acquainted with how tough our economic times are. So we want to make sure we do what we can for workers, apprentices and trainees who are feeling the impacts most particularly.

In an economic downturn, apprentices and trainees are regrettably often the first workers to be laid off. We do not want to end up with a skills deficit when the economy recovers. The nation's skills shortage is still a fresh memory and Queensland will not be caught flat-footed.

The Bligh government is determined to look beyond this current global recession and ensure that our workforce has the skills and experience needed when the economy bounces back. We are working to meet our commitment that three out of four Queenslanders will hold trade, training or tertiary qualifications.

We are looking over the horizon. That is why we initiated the \$1 billion Queensland Skills Plan in 2006 which I had the pleasure of jointly launching at that time. I cannot let it go without saying that we did so to fill a vacuum that the former federal government left over 12 years, when everyone was crying out for a national skills plan to meet the challenges that we are now having to meet. There was deathly silence at a federal level. Fortunately now with the Rudd Labor government we have a partnership about building skills for the future.

In 2008-09 extra training places for certificate IV or higher were created towards our target of 14,000 extra places by 2010. A certificate IV and higher qualifications are nationally recognised and are considered critical to meeting the skilling needs at the paraprofessional level. This level of qualification can lead to both further studies and full-time employment. For trade training funding, an additional 10,500 places have been created. We aim to make a total of an additional 17,000 places available by 2010. Trade training will ensure that we have skilled carpenters, plumbers and electricians to meet future growth.

To create and support jobs for Queenslanders in 2009-10 we will invest \$203 million to support apprentices and trainees and create further commencements. Over the next three years we want to see the creation of 165,000 new apprenticeships and traineeships, in addition to the 90,000 existing positions.

CHAIR: The time has expired for the minister's answer. I call the member for Morayfield.

Mr RYAN: Minister, we are all aware of the impacts that the global financial recession has had on employment figures, particularly apprentices. However, skill shortages still exist in some key industry areas. Minister, how is the government working with industry to address these skill shortages in these key industries?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Workforce planning and development is a key component in the development of any industry or regional economy. To enable good planning to happen, our government has implemented the Skills Formation Strategy initiative as part of the \$1 billion Queensland Skills Plan. The Skills Formation Strategy is supporting the skilling of the workforce, a key element in creating and supporting jobs in Queensland. We are working with local government and industry to find out where vacancies exist and what training is needed to match people with jobs.

Today I am happy to announce that the Bligh government has recently embarked upon two new skills formation strategies. In the central west of Queensland, tourism operators have joined forces to build the local tourism industry to meet the projected growth and help support local jobs. Funding of \$240,000 will help develop a skills formation strategy to attract, recruit, skill and retain existing workers.

Longreach tourism operator Mrs Glenda Daly will lead the strategy to create long-term plans for the local industry. We want to ensure that central west tourism operators do not face a future struggle to find skilled workers. Workers will be needed across the sectors, ranging from hospitality to tour guide positions. The outback tourism skills formation strategy will help address this issue.

In Gladstone the government is joining forces with manufacturing and engineering companies to help support local jobs. Regardless of the economic climate, Gladstone will remain Queensland's premier heavy industry hub and centre of excellence for light metals engineering and manufacturing. No-one knows that better than the honourable member for Gladstone. That is why the region needs comprehensive workforce planning to ensure an economic recovery is not restrained by a lack of skilled employees.

Through the government's Skills Formation Strategy initiative local enterprises will drive this critical planning process. The government's key partner in this regard is the Gladstone Engineering Alliance. It will receive \$240,000 over two years to develop the Gladstone manufacturing and engineering skills formation strategy.

Overall the government has launched 51 successful strategy projects in a variety of industries ranging from aged care and agriculture to biotechnology and boat building since 2003. In 2009-10 the government will establish up to six additional skills formation strategies. The skills formation strategies are a great example of how state and local governments are working closely with industry to get Queensland through these tough times and be well placed to boost economic growth when conditions improve.

As I was saying to the honourable member who asked the previous question, traineeships and apprenticeships are vital. What we are doing is spending \$57 million towards the Green Army initiative—a three-year election commitment that will create 3,000 jobs, including 700 new traineeships. Creating a new approach to the 10 per cent training policy on our infrastructure is a very important move forward, and I hope to get the opportunity later this morning to explain that more fully to the members of the committee.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to the SDS at page 3-116 and the number of apprentices in training. What is the Bligh government doing to support apprentices who have lost their job? What is the government doing to ensure that their training does not go to waste?

Mr WILSON: The economic crisis hit hard in the Queensland economy last year, really emerging in a public way in October or November or thereabouts, and I well recall that in my previous role because of the impact it had initially on the mining industry. We are acting to protect apprentice and trainee jobs, and that is why last December we set up the Trade Training Task Force comprising representatives from unions, employers and key stakeholders to develop a range of initiatives. These initiatives were formed under the safety net package for apprentices and trainees who may have ended up being let go because of the economic crisis. Up to \$20 million has been committed to this safety initiative.

My department is implementing these initiatives, including the provision of institutionalised training arrangements, revised stand-down arrangements and the provision of an Out-of-Trade Register. The online Out-of-Trade Register contains details of apprentices and trainees whose employment has been affected by the downturn in business and assists them regain employment and complete training. The register holds details at all levels and locations across a range of industries, including building and construction, electrical, engineering, automotive, hairdressing and hospitality. This is an opportunity for local businesses to recruit available workers who have already demonstrated an aptitude and commitment to their chosen trade.

As well as our safety net initiatives, our centre of excellence, Construction Skills Queensland, has opened a skilling solutions centre on its premises which offers a one-stop shop for support to workers and employees in their industries. Energy Skills Queensland is also well underway in finalising its industry centre. The centre provides advice on changing careers or building businesses through workforce planning and engaging with industry and local communities through a series of skill formation strategies. Skills will be a passport for people to gain employment as the economy recovers from the global financial crisis. Our strategies will help us find out where vacancies exist and what training is needed to match people with jobs.

We also helped provide jobs for apprentices and trainees through our \$136 million investment in training infrastructure in 2009-10. On top of this, we will ensure the government's new 10 per cent policy, which I referred to earlier, on government infrastructure projects maximises the employment of apprentices. This applies not only to state funded infrastructure projects but also to federally funded infrastructure projects. This will stimulate demand for an estimated 3,500 apprenticeship and traineeship opportunities during the next three years. All of these initiatives and programs are a good example of the government working with stakeholders to support apprentices and trainees in these tough economic times. We are working hard to keep every person now undertaking an apprenticeship or a traineeship in the system. We know it is an investment in their future and the future of Queensland industry.

CHAIR: Order! The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to employee expenses at page 3-121, have you received a briefing or a briefing note at any time on how the Queensland government's budget position impacts on the ability of your government to fund public sector pay rises, notably teacher pay rises?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have said before, we value our teachers and we value our principals. Indeed, we value the 80,000 workers—not just teachers—who are employed by the Department of Education and Training and we want to make sure that whether it be teachers or any other worker employed within my portfolio we put forward—and we believe we have—a fair offer on the table. We have earnestly pursued that offer in negotiations in the case of teachers with the Teachers Union, and we will continue to do so.

You would be aware that the matter of the negotiations between the unions over the certified agreement applying to teachers is now before the Industrial Relations Commission of Queensland, which has exercised its conciliation powers and commenced a conciliation process. That is going to a hearing indeed on Friday and that matter is now in the commission. So I do not wish to canvass more broadly the issues that are now before the commission. But I can assure you that the government has brought an attitude of fairness and a keen awareness of its financial responsibilities to bear in examining the appropriateness of the approach that we have taken to the future remuneration of all of our valued teachers and principals employed by my department.

We will bring our best endeavours to the table in the Industrial Relations Commission, under the active oversight of and supervision by the commission, and we will abide by all directions and orders both as to process and to outcome that may come from the commission exercising its powers. I look forward and continue to be positive about the position that has emerged and will continue to do so. The government is very keen to make sure that we do the right thing not just by teachers but also by all Queenslanders whom we are responsible for.

Dr FLEGG: I have no idea whether that was a yes or a no, which was all that was required. But I have formed the view, Minister, that you may well have had secret briefings in relation to the capacity of the Queensland budget to meet public sector pay rises, notably teacher pay rises. An attempt by myself to uncover that under FOI—and I will table the FOI response—uncovered four documents in relation to ministerial briefings in your department on just this very matter. So I am of the view that you have had secret briefings on the issue of the ability to fund these public sector pay rises, and I would ask you whether you have passed on this information to the Teachers Union and why in fact it is so necessary that it be secret. I will table that FOI request response.

Mr WILSON: This is an astonishing question that shows an absolute absence of understanding about how our industrial relations system operates and how executive government operates. I indicated earlier that the government has approached consideration of the appropriate offer to be made to teachers in a most careful and prudent way, balancing the two key obligations I believe—that is, to ensure that we can truly say we have put forward a fair and reasonable offer firstly and, secondly, that we are being true to our responsibility as trustees, as it were, to Queenslanders of being financially prudent in what is being put forward. That approach has not surprisingly demanded that not only cabinet but individual members of cabinet be acutely aware of the economic conditions of the Queensland economy—if some people are not, we are—and consequently the economic circumstances and financial circumstances more particularly of the Queensland budget going forward.

There is no secret about the economic situation of the Queensland economy. There is no secret about the economic financial circumstances of the Queensland budget. Indeed, I attended, along with 650 others, a post budget lunch in the second or third week of June where the Treasurer, before all of the business leaders of Queensland, ran a PowerPoint presentation—I would have thought that that was pretty unprecedented actually—and then stepped through the explanation of our circumstances. Then the Premier and the Treasurer made themselves available to questions from a moderator and I think also answered questions from the floor. It is the biggest open secret in Queensland that the Queensland economy has taken a big hit. In fact, I think the Premier's statement is that a big truck has just been driven through the financial circumstances of the Queensland economy and consequently a big truck through the Queensland budget.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to BER funding in this budget at page 3-102, on 22 April 2009 you revealed that 184 new primary school halls would be built and there would be four refurbishments. Given that you revealed that there are 243 state primary schools with over 500 children enrolled and yet on a question on notice you were totally unable to determine which or how many of those schools already had a hall in which they could assemble the whole school, if you do not have basic information of this type, even on the biggest schools in the state, how on earth can you prioritise where these school halls should be placed?

Mr WILSON: Lots of your questions do seem to come home to the Building the Education Revolution along with the State Schools of Tomorrow program, which originally started out at \$850 million over a four- to five-year period. Those two big building projects are providing new and expanded facilities in every Queensland school. Through my director-general, I may ask for any relevant officer if they are present here this morning who may be able to respond in a moment more directly to

the particular accounting question that you have asked. But I do value your interest and your continuing interest in the aggregation of more facilities at our state schools, because these facilities are a key part—one part of which there are several other parts—of the strategy of building the best education system that we can in Queensland because we think Queensland students deserve the best education system. I will ask my deputy director-general to respond to the accounting question.

Mr Wagner: The process we followed was to visit each school and consult with the P&C and the school principal about the guidelines and the outcome required. So we actually did an audit of every school in Queensland to achieve the outcome post the FOI.

Mr WILSON: Thank you. May I just continue in responding to the honourable member for Moggill. Firstly, I want to correct the record. Earlier I referred to a school on the Gold Coast near Coomera. It is more accurately Highland Reserve State School just in terms of clarity for the record.

Secondly, I refer to an earlier question in relation to teacher vacancies from Dr Flegg. I can also say that I have since now been advised by my department that a number of vacancies, particularly in the metropolitan areas, are now being filled temporarily to ensure there are sufficient positions for teachers on transfer and also for permanent teachers returning from leave. The vacancies advertised on the website as of today are one permanent vacancy and 11 temporary vacancies. This website is updated when regions notify of vacancies. Of course, you would anticipate that that could be on a daily basis.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to BER, I will table some plans that have been prepared by the Mount Crosby State School, because I think it highlights three things that I am concerned about to see value for this BER money. Firstly, a school that has none of these facilities at all has missed out in both the first two rounds.

Mr WILSON: I am sorry, Dr Flegg. What was that school?

Dr FLEGG: Mount Crosby State School. So there is a significant issue with prioritisation, but more particularly a lot of schools have done this wonderful work of preparing their own designs for what meets their needs and pricing them—and these have been priced similar to what you are paying for a school hall—and we are not getting that local input and value. We have a 1,300 square metre hall, a creative arts centre and gallery, a 400 square metre library and a big outdoor teaching area. Will you change the way this is being done so that these schools can get what they have designed and planned for themselves so that we really get some value for this money or, if Mount Crosby gets lucky in the final round, will they just get a stock standard hall and have all of this work ignored?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. If I missed the first part of your question, I apologise. This is a question directed towards BER funding or State Schools of Tomorrow?

Dr FLEGG: I am asking about BER funding and the three concerns that I have. One is the priority as to why a school with nothing has missed out when other schools that already have halls have been funded. But in particular, this and other schools—but this is a great example—have done this fabulous work and yet their own work is often being disregarded and they are being given a standard product. The third one is the value, because they can build twice what is being built in some of the other projects for roughly the same amount of money.

Mr WILSON: This is in relation to a hall?

Dr FLEGG: This is a hall, a library, a creative arts centre and an outdoor area that I understand has been priced at \$2.4 million.

Mr WILSON: Thank you very much. You will appreciate that the details of the matter you have just recited are not of personal, direct knowledge by me.

Dr FLEGG: Yes.

Mr WILSON: So in a moment I will have an officer help you with a response to that question. Can I just make a number of overall observations to make sure that people do not misunderstand how the BER program is working. The funding is allocated in three major elements, but the long and the short of it is that the money that is allocated all goes to the relevant school. The money goes to the school. It does not go to QBuild; it does not go to the state government for some unrelated purposes. The money allocated, as when announced, goes to the school for appropriation on the project that has been approved. That is the first thing.

Secondly, different components of the BER program are indeed being rolled out in stages. The National School Pride, the P21 and the science and language centre programs—that is high school specific so it would not affect Mount Crosby—are being rolled out in several phases as the best way not only to have the stimulus package move quickly but also to ensure it is done in an orderly way.

Thirdly, a key priority is to make sure we get value for money and the value for money is obtained by acting on the advice of the government's building experts, who are from the Department of Public Works and who work closely with the private sector construction industry day by day. In working closely with them—

Dr FLEGG: I think it is the schools that would actually give you value for money—bringing them into it.

Mr WILSON: And working closely with DPW, we have adopted a procurement approach that addresses the challenges. The whole of Queensland's 1,251 schools are all potentially getting two or three projects undertaken at their site in a space of 12 or 18 months in conjunction with the state government's \$600-odd million capital works program that may be happening at some of those schools as well. So they are the challenges. The advice coming to me about the general approach is that school communities are working closely with department officials as well as with the—

CHAIR: Order! The time for answering that question has expired and the time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Mr WATT: Minister, I refer you to page 3-116 of the SDS. Could the minister outline how the Bligh government's building program is helping to keep Queensland apprentices and trainees in jobs?

Mr WILSON: I thought we might come to the 10 per cent policy. That is what I want to talk about now.

Mr WATT: So do I.

Mr WILSON: So I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is investing, as we have said occasionally before, \$18 billion in infrastructure this financial year. That means investing more money in apprentices and trainees than ever before. How many builders, plumbers, carpenters, nurses and teachers would be out of work, I regret to say, if the opposition was successful at the recent election? They had planned to slash 36,000 public sector jobs from the time of assumption to office, if they had been fortunate enough to win the election. In addition they would have been cancelling major building programs, including the \$18 billion infrastructure program, which will deliver 127,000 jobs.

The government's building program, as I say, is about creating jobs for Queenslanders. In conjunction, we are implementing a new approach to the government's 10% Training Policy on infrastructure projects to maximise the employment of apprentices and trainees. You have all been wanting to know what that means. What does the 10 per cent policy mean? It means a minimum of 10 per cent of the total labour hours on any Queensland government building or civil construction funded project valued at over \$250,000 for building and \$500,000 for civil construction will be undertaken by apprentices, trainees, cadets, Indigenous workers or through the upskilling of existing workers. We are tying the employment of new trainees and apprentices to public sector infrastructure investment. I met recently with key construction companies who are actively supporting the 10 per cent policy, because they recognise the importance of building skills now and for future.

In 2009 we committed to extending this to include all applicable capital works projects managed or led by Queensland. So federally funded projects managed by the state will now contribute to increasing the Queensland building and construction industry skills base. The policy means jobs for apprentices. It will stimulate demand for an estimated 3,500 apprenticeships and traineeships during the next three years. The policy is working and we will continue delivering on our commitment. As of June 2009 there were training opportunities for an additional 1,313 apprentices, trainees and cadets and 94 additional training opportunities for existing workers.

The Bligh government is meeting, as I say, its 10 per cent policy commitment. It is anticipated that a further 1,180 apprentice or trainee opportunities will be created in 2009-10. Our building and construction centre of excellence, Construction Skills Queensland, is working with the government to ensure compliance with the program. I just want to commend Construction Skills Queensland. It is one of the best organisations that we have ever created in the construction industry. They are doing a top job. During the economic downturn, investing in infrastructure and building for the future is the best way to create jobs.

CHAIR: The Minister's time for answering that question has expired.

Mrs SCOTT: I refer to page 3-116 of the SDS and the number of commencements for apprentices and trainees aged 15 to 17. Minister, what is the government doing to support school based apprenticeships and traineeships? How is Queensland performing compared to the rest of the nation with regard to school based apprenticeship and traineeship commencements?

Mr WILSON: This is a very good story, and I mean that in quite an objective way. It illustrates what Queensland is doing. We are doing far better than anywhere else in the country in school based apprenticeships—significantly better—and it is a commendation to everyone associated with it. It is a non-partisan issue. It is just a commendable outcome.

We are the national leader in training school based apprentices and trainees. Last year Queensland accounted for 42 per cent of all school based apprentice and trainee commencements in Australia. I dare to say that this is an outcome of our ETRF strategy—our Education and Training Reforms for the Future strategy—introduced about two terms ago. School based apprenticeships and traineeships allow students, typically in years 11 and 12, to study for their Queensland Certificate of Education while at the same time undertaking an apprenticeship or traineeship. More than 50,000 young people have experienced the benefits of these traineeships since the program started in

Queensland more than 10 years ago. These traineeships play a key role in increasing the efficiency of recruitment processes, generating new ideas, improving productivity and making a contribution to their community.

The government recognises the benefits of these apprenticeships and traineeships for young people and industry. That is why we have committed \$6.2 million over three years to support schools to coordinate the expanded SAT program—that is the school based apprenticeships and traineeships program—as well as expending \$12 million on User Choice funds on school based apprentice and trainee training in 2008-09. Since 2006, Queensland has seen a 51 per cent increase in the commencements of school based apprenticeships across all industry areas and a significant growth in the uptake of all SATs in the skill shortage areas of automotive, construction, engineering and hospitality.

The students of today will become the workforce of tomorrow and we need them to have the best possible training and skills. The Bligh government is creating an army of more than 250,000 trainees and apprentices to help build Queensland's path to an economic recovery. We are maintaining our record \$18 billion infrastructure program as part of our commitment to creating new Queensland jobs, and that means investing more money in apprentices and trainees than ever before.

The nation's skills shortage is still a fresh memory and Queensland does not want to be caught flat-footed. We need the next generation of tradespeople learning their skills now. The Bligh government is determined to look beyond this current global recession and ensure that our workforce has the skills and experience needed when the economy bounces back. The global economic crisis has forced the government to reassess its priorities and, along with our commitment to jobs and infrastructure, we will continue creating positions for apprentices and trainees so that we are ready when the better times return.

Mr RYAN: I refer to the staffing figures contained in page 3-108 of the SDS. Minister, please inform the committee of any problems that your department is experiencing in relation to the retention of teachers and any strategies in place to remedy these problems.

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. In 2007 and 2008, the number of teachers leaving Queensland state schools to move to another state was 75 and 82 respectively. These numbers represent approximately 0.2 per cent of the total teaching workforce. The rate of attrition for Queensland state school teachers during 2008 was just 4.2 per cent, which is the lowest rate of attrition in the past five years. Beginning teachers have even lower attrition rates, I am advised, at just three per cent each year. More than 90 per cent of teachers who commenced teaching over the past five years remain in teaching.

At the start of the 2009 school year, 15,322 suitably qualified and registered teachers had applied for some form of employment—either permanent, temporary or casual—with Education Queensland. Currently, over the 2009 school year, 72 per cent of these applicants have been employed by the department in some capacity. On average, 1,500 to 2,000 new permanent teachers are employed each year. For the 2009 school year, the department has appointed a total of 1,926 teachers in a permanent capacity.

Queensland teachers enjoy some of the nation's best working conditions, with class size targets among the lowest in the country. We are clearly on the right track, because the 2008 School Opinion Survey showed that four out of five teachers agreed that they are happy working in their school. Last year's survey is a good measure because we received 49,000 responses from DET staff.

We continue to hire new teachers each year to cater for enrolment growth. In 2009 we hired an extra 358 teachers to ensure that our class size targets were maintained in the face of an unexpected spike in state school enrolments. From 2009-10 an estimated 407 additional teachers will start work in Queensland state schools. An extra 75 will work with students with a disability and 10 more will work with students with learning difficulties and in the guidance and behaviour management support areas.

Under our Science Spark program, we will employ 100 new science teachers and 15 science teacher trainers. We are also meeting our commitment to boosting education standards in Queensland schools by hiring 80 specialist teacher literacy and numeracy coaches.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The committee will now adjourn for morning tea.

Proceedings suspended from 10.31 am to 10.47 am

CHAIR: The hearing of estimates G is resumed. The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Training. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure be agreed to. I call the member for Gladstone.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Without wanting to impinge on the Industrial Relations Commission's current considerations, in relation to non-government question on notice No. 5, the minister states, 'Queensland teachers enjoy nationally competitive total salary packages.' The teachers' current wage dispute states that, even with the offered wage package, Queensland teachers will be the second lowest in Australia. Minister, could you clarify that disparity?

Mr WILSON: The essential disparity is around whether you examine the total salary package or whether you examine the base rate. The short point is that every worker looks at the total salary package and I can assure you that every employer in the Queensland government needs to look at the total salary package in assessing what is a fair and reasonable offer and what is financially prudent from the employer's point of view or the taxpayers' point of view.

I appreciate the caveat that you commenced your question with. It is appropriate now that the Industrial Relations Commission of Queensland has intervened to conciliate between the parties in this matter that matters associated with the dispute are best left for the Industrial Relations Commission to address with the parties before it. I understand that the hearing resumes on Friday. I can underline that the government will bring its best endeavours to the process, and of course we will comply fully with both procedural and outcome requirements that may emerge from the Industrial Relations Commission.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: In relation to the current round of wage negotiations, what is the increase that is being budgeted for in the current budget documents?

Mr WILSON: The 12.5 per cent over three years equates to \$894 million. That is for the life of the agreement. It is a three-year agreement.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Again, in relation to non-government question on notice No. 5, the committee was advised that there will be an additional 350 full-time equivalent teachers and teacher aides. Can the minister clarify whether this number of additional staff is over and above the current staff allocation, including those who retire or separate from the Department of Education and Training for any number of reasons?

Mr WILSON: That is the headline figure. I will need to get some advice from my departmental officers as to the make-up of that total figure and what it reflects in terms of enrolment growth and retirements and what have you. As a headline figure, as you will appreciate, that is a significant continuing contribution to supporting and improving our state education system for the benefit of children and parents within the state education system. I will let my director-general address the question.

Ms Grantham: The additional 350 teacher and teacher aides are to address enrolment growth. There are often additional teachers who are employed to replace teachers who have retired or resigned or gone on long-term leave. That 350 relates specifically to predicted enrolment growth.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Minister, I refer to the Queensland Treasury Corporation report on the viability of Central Queensland University. Can you provide the committee with your views on the future of CQU and this government's financial commitment to CQU now and into the future?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Queensland government is committed to doing whatever it can to support access to higher education for Queenslanders throughout the state. Just as we have a strong commitment in the early years, in the schooling years and in the TAFE sector, that commitment travels right through to higher education, despite the fact that since 1975 funding of universities has been taken over by the federal government. The Central Queensland University is federally funded with some very small contribution, as I understand it, from the state government. Across the university sector, there is some small contribution to the universities in Queensland from the state government sector. About 96 per cent of the funding comes from the federal government.

We are very committed to the continuation of the Central Queensland University, and we are working closely with the federal government in providing the support that the university may need within the context of what I have just described. I understand that a new vice-chancellor will shortly take up office who will give new leadership to that institution. The issues raised in the Queensland Treasury Corporation report are of concern. I should underline that the government of Queensland has not done the report on the Central Queensland University. The Central Queensland University engaged the Queensland Treasury Corporation as a consultant to do work for them to provide that institution with better guidance on how to manage their way forward into the future.

I have just been provided with some additional information. The review found that the recent downturns in international and domestic enrolments invariably affected CQU's cash flow and challenged its ongoing financial viability. CQU already has, I am advised, been taking steps to improve its operating result in the short term and to extend the availability of current cash reserves to mid-2012, with renewal revenue strategies expected to be in place by that time.

There are options to provide an operational buffer, as set out in the report so I am advised, involving selling non-essential assets. That is, I am advised, in the report. That would be a matter for the chancellor of the university. The first step to renewal, as I have indicated, is the appointment of the new vice-chancellor, who will take office on 1 August, which is only a week or two away. He will consult closely with the federal government and the state government on the action plan for the short term and the long term.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr WILSON: Could I have permission for an extension if the member would consent to that?

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Yes, certainly.

CHAIR: Please continue, Minister.

Mr WILSON: The Australian government's higher education reforms, I am advised, provide opportunities for the Central Queensland University to improve its position. The university will work with the federal government, and of course with the state government and other education and training providers, and Central Queensland industry and communities to take advantage of those opportunities. Queensland and the Australian governments will set financial, participation and quality targets for CQU and monitor its performance over the short term to medium term.

I want to stress the importance of the continuation of Central Queensland University. The opportunity that that university in such an important regional area offers to students who might not otherwise get access to higher education is very important. It is a big regional state. It can be a challenge not only in remote areas but also up and down the coast to provide access to higher education for students. So it is important to meet those challenges and for the Central Queensland University and all parties to work well together to make sure that they can plot a path to long-term future financial viability, despite the impact of the international economic situation on the mix of their student cohort. They have lost so many of their international students which has made such a big dint, as I understand it, in their revenue. I am sure you will join with us in seeking the continuation of the university.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Certainly. With reference to page 3-116 of the SDS, I note that funding for Gladstone TAFE is aggregated under the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE. With significant growth in the Gladstone region articulated by the Premier and a number of ministers, what additional funding and staff have been allocated to the Gladstone campus for the 2009-10 period to accommodate increased training demands?

Mr WILSON: I will ask, through my director-general, for one of my officers to ferret out that detail. You will appreciate that that particular detail is not at my fingertips. But I want you and the committee to well understand that we are strongly committed to the TAFE sector. There are 13, I think it is, TAFE institutes. Two of them are statutory institutes. They are key vehicles for us promoting and making available to Queenslanders wherever they might be access to TAFE and further educational opportunities. Especially in the Gladstone area this is important.

The decisions made by each of the TAFE's campus by campus about the staffing mix—and some of the TAFE's have multiple campuses—would be directed, I believe, by the TAFE council to reflect the current and also to anticipate the future training needs within the local economy of that area to ensure that, as far as possible, the courses are relevant to that local area. In correlation to that is the need to ensure that the teaching expertise on deck is appropriate for those courses that need to be taught at that campus.

I have just been advised by my director-general that the Gladstone campus of the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE will benefit from significant infrastructure upgrades in the 2009-10 financial year. Over the financial year, the campus will benefit from upgrades to buildings, plant and equipment worth \$1.7 million. I am not sure whether my director-general has further information available yet, but if it is not presently available I will get some information for you if we have that so we can provide it to you in this session.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Thank you. Unfortunately, for us the TAFE lost some of its presence in the community, if you like, when the director left and took his position to Rockhampton. I believe over time since then the place of TAFE in the community has been lost. Would you be prepared to review the staffing structure and administrative structure to try to get a better presence for TAFE in the Gladstone community?

Mr WILSON: I am very happy to have a look at the issue you have raised. I do have a perspective I have acquired in recent years, not just in the last couple of months, that the community and public regard for TAFE and further education is not where it ought to be. There is a split personality to some extent within the community about the academic stream of learning and the non-academic or vocational stream of learning. I am genuinely committed to examining ways of lifting the profile and public esteem in which TAFE and further education should be held by parents. We need to encourage the outlook that students can achieve in a whole range of different learning pathways and that outcomes and excellence are not confined to the university focused academic stream of learning, important as that is. They are all important. During the early years of the economic boom when trades men and women were getting very highly paid because of the shortage of skills, the public did start to change their mind a bit about how valuable a TAFE education was because of the higher wage value being attached to workers in that area.

I am very keen and happy to talk with you about what is happening in your local area and do what we can to lift the profile of and the public regard for TAFE. If we can do that, we will also lift the level of attractiveness of a TAFE education for those students who are leaving school. That is why I am actually

quite excited by the school based apprenticeship system. We are at 42 per cent of the total uptake in Australia, compared to our population of around 21 or 22 per cent. That is where you create the bridge for young people out of school and into longer term TAFE and further education and training—rather than having them going directly into the workforce and not getting any skills, other than the school of hard knocks, or alternatively not getting any employment at all.

I am happy to look at the issues you have raised. If there are opportunities for that particular TAFE campus or the TAFE itself that would help address your concerns, I am certainly happy to have my departmental officers and the TAFE officers examine that with you.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Thank you. In relation to non-government question No. 10 referring to apprentices, 48 apprentices lost their training in Gladstone due to employer difficulties, and they were usually financial difficulties. The minister referred earlier to the government's Out-of-Trade Register. Of the \$20 million safety net package, what has been allocated to Gladstone's out-of-trade apprentices and what has been expended across the state?

Mr WILSON: The funds are made available across the state. I do not have at my fingertips what funds have been expended to this point and, more particularly, what might have been spent region by region. If we can find that, I am certainly happy to get my director-general and her officers to dig that out. I do know that the Out-of-Trade Register has been working well. We would like it to work better and ideally have everyone who registers on the register able to pick up employment with an alternative employer either in the locality or in another locality, but life is not quite like that.

A significant number of those who go on the register actually end up being able to pick up work in other areas. I stand to be corrected here, but I think it is somewhere in the order of 40 per cent. That is 40 per cent who might not have otherwise picked up alternative work if the register had not been operating, so it is an important tool that is being used to facilitate the transfer from one industry sector to another. For example, they could go from the heavy engineering area in Gladstone with some engineering and mechanical skills into the mining industry or vice versa.

In relation to Gladstone, I am advised by my director-general that the number of apprentices in training in the Gladstone electorate has decreased apparently in line with the trends state-wide such that as of 26 June there were 1,198 apprentices in training in the Gladstone electorate. That is a 5.9 per cent decrease on the 2008 figures and a five per cent increase on the 2007 figures. This reflects no doubt what you have personally experienced and noticed within the Gladstone area—that is, the impact of the economic circumstances on business activity in that area. I am also advised that there are 16 apprentices from Gladstone registered on the Out-of-Trade Register.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Is that all?

Mr WILSON: If there are opportunities to make the Out-of-Trade Register more widely known, we are very keen to identify them. A lot of work is done with employers in an endeavour to make them aware of the Out-of-Trade Register because it is just as helpful for employers as it is for apprentices who are out of their trade that they access the register. As supply and demand for labour in industries shifts, employers want to use the register as well.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I have a follow-up question or a related question, if you like. One of the big issues in the region—and I am sure it applies across the state—is that some employers become marginal in terms of their ability to support an apprentice; it is not that they are unwilling to do it. Are there any initiatives that employers can access to enable them to fulfil their obligations to their indentured apprentices? As I said, this relates particularly to those who find themselves in a marginal situation where for the short term perhaps there is a financial strain on the business.

Mr WILSON: That is an important question you have raised. I do know that the department works closely with employers who have apprentices to identify whether there are alternative ways of keeping the apprentice engaged by variations to the apprenticeship itself. There are efforts to avoid the point of cancellation being reached. The objective is to retain those workers who are already in apprenticeships for as long as possible. I will ask through the director-general for someone to give you a more direct and detailed answer on that.

Mr Camm: The Out-of-Trade Register, as the minister has touched on, is working reasonably effectively across the state. It largely requires engagement from both employers and apprentices and trainees. In terms of the support for employers, there is an engagement strategy through our department's regions where we are contacting employers and visiting employers and their apprentices, as are our industry partners, particularly Construction Skills Queensland, Energy Skills Queensland and Manufacturing Skills Queensland, in terms of trying to case manage and mentor both the employer and the apprentice.

In terms of options that are put to employers, rather than just cancelling or suspending apprentices we are encouraging them to consider and convert the apprenticeships to part time. We are encouraging them to place the apprentice into college rather than put them out of work. Some of those institutional arrangements which will apply across the state are a work in progress at the moment. We are asking employers to use their networks to temporarily transfer the apprentice to other employers,

which has worked in some parts of the industry. We are asking employers to apply flexible stand-down arrangements to enable the apprentice, if it is a short-term situation, to come back into the marketplace relatively quickly. Certainly we are encouraging institutional training arrangements for those third and fourth year apprentices who do lose their job. Rather than lose them to the industry, we are encouraging them to access TAFE and private college training.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Thank you.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions from non-government members has expired. Minister, what is the Bligh Labor government doing to combat violence and bullying in our schools?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Queensland state schools are stepping up their fight against violence and bullying under a state-wide review of student disciplinary processes that I announced earlier this month. We know that a substantial number of school disciplinary absences are the result of unacceptable behaviour, such as physical violence, verbal abuse and persistent disruptive behaviour. As with the vast majority of parents, I am very concerned about the level of violence in our schools which is reflected in the increase in suspensions of students occurring in all 10 education regions.

The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to improving standards in Queensland classrooms by giving teachers and principals more tools to tackle bullying and bad behaviour in our schools. Schools have been asked to review their responsible behaviour plans, which set behaviour standards and consequences for failing to meet them. An international bullying expert will be engaged to help develop better state-wide strategies to deal with these issues. I anticipate that the expert will commence in late August. It is also important to address the underlying issues that cause students to behave badly in the first place. Disciplinary action sends a message, but it is also vital that we are able to help and support students who consistently misbehave to change their behaviour.

The Bligh government is investing more than \$28 million in behaviour support programs in 2009-10, and this includes 15 positive learning centres throughout the state, more than 90 additional alternative learning programs and over 300 behaviour management teachers working in our schools. Helping students learn from their behaviour and giving them the support they need to change are key elements for improving behaviour standards in our schools. Teachers have a right to teach and students have a right to learn in safe environments free from bullying and violence. We want school communities, teachers and principals to know that they have the government's full support in setting high expectations and taking a strong stance on bad behaviour.

Mr WATT: Minister, I refer to the staffing figures mentioned in the SDS on page 3-108. I realise you have already talked a bit about some of the salary conditions of teachers compared to other states, but for the benefit of the committee can you please outline how the salary of Queensland teachers does compare to those of teachers in other states?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The government is meeting its commitment to improving standards in Queensland classrooms. A quality education system requires quality teachers. We know that quality teaching is crucial to boosting student outcomes. It was identified as a key issue for Professor Masters in his review of Queensland's education system.

Queensland is lucky to have about 47,500 talented and dedicated teachers working in our classrooms trying to achieve the very best for our schoolchildren. On average, the teaching ranks are bolstered each year with between 1,500 and 2,000 new permanent teachers. We know that we need to continue to attract bright, committed teachers to ensure our students get the best possible education in the world-class system that we have made a commitment to providing.

We are working towards ensuring our teachers are among the nation's best. We are also improving their conditions in the classroom. Queensland has some of Australia's lowest class sizes: 25 children per classroom in prep to year 3; 28 children in year 4 to year 10; and 25 children in years 11 and 12.

When the opposition was in power in 1996, 1997 and 1998 there were 450,000 students and 30,000 full-time equivalent teachers providing a student-teacher ratio of 14.6. Our government's commitment to bringing down class sizes and contributing record funding into education has seen a reduction in the student-teacher ratio to 12.9. In 2009 there were 483,200 students and 37,347 teachers. In 2010 the number of teachers will increase to 37,754 and the number of students will jump to 488,235 but we will maintain the student-teacher ratio of 12.9.

If we had maintained the same student-teacher ratio as the opposition had in government, there would be 4,427 fewer teachers in our schools next year. But that should come as no surprise, really, when one recalls that earlier this year the LNP proposed that there would be a cut of 12,000 public sector jobs each year for three years. A total of 36,000 jobs would be gone. The LNP has made it clear—

CHAIR: Order. I call the member for Woodridge.

Mrs SCOTT: I ask the minister to please update the committee on the department's response to protecting the students mentioned on page 3-107 of the SDS from the spread of swine flu.

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Of course, our first priority in dealing with swine flu is to protect students and staff from the risk of this illness. Human swine influenza is spread from person to person in the same way seasonal influenza and other common respiratory infections spread.

Queensland Health is currently coordinating Queensland's response to the recent international flu outbreak to ensure that all Queenslanders are protected and provided with health support and vital information. My department is working closely with Queensland Health to ensure a proactive ongoing response to the management of human swine influenza in Education Queensland schools.

On 25 May the Premier announced that Queensland would adopt the national policy of asking students to stay away from school for seven days if they had recently returned from countries affected by human swine influenza. The government made the decision to introduce the quarantine period on advice from the Chief Health Officer. Queensland is now in the 'protect' phase in managing the pandemic H1N1 2009 outbreak following the announcement in June by the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, that Australia would move to the 'protect' phase level, meaning there would no longer be mass closures of schools and early childhood education and care services. Under the previous 'contain' phase, school exclusions and closures remained in place in Queensland until the end of the school term on 26 June. From 4 June to 26 June a total of 51 schools and child-care centres in Queensland were closed for a period of time. Of these, 30 were state schools.

Queensland's Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeanette Young, has advised that Queensland's efforts to restrict the spread of human swine flu in June were very effective. The efforts of our staff in schools, TAFEs and the Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care have played an enormous part in that success, along with every other person who was involved in responding to such a demanding situation. My department is continuing to work closely with Queensland Health to ensure a proactive, ongoing response to the management of human swine influenza within our schools. The honourable member for Moggill, Dr Flegg, would no doubt be one of many who would well appreciate that my department's response to the human swine influenza continues to be guided by the medical advice provided by Queensland Health.

CHAIR: I call the member for Morayfield.

Mr RYAN: Minister, please update the committee on the outcomes of the year 12 students listed on page 3-114 of the SDS.

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. In 2008, 24,312 students in 249 state high schools, special schools, colleges and other centres were issued with senior statements. Just over two out of every three, or 67.7 per cent, were awarded a Queensland Certificate of Education. Approximately 65.9 per cent received an OP of 1 through to 15 or an International Baccalaureate Diploma.

The government's focus on improving vocational education and training has seen an increase in the number of students awarded one or more VET qualifications. In 2006 there were 9,634 students, or 40.1 per cent of the graduating class; in 2007 some 12,079, or just about half—49.8 per cent—were graduates; and in 2008, 15,120, or 62.2 per cent, were graduating students. We have increased by over 47 per cent the number of students completing or having completed a school based apprenticeship or traineeship from 2,268, or 9.9 per cent, in 2006 to 3,490, or 14.4 per cent, in 2008. Our achievements in increasing the number of opportunities available to year 12 students has put us well on the way to achieving the Toward Q2 target of having all Queenslanders hold trade, training or tertiary qualifications by 2020.

Helping students become more employable by gaining valuable vocational qualifications and work experience is another way in which the Bligh government is meeting its commitment to supporting jobs for Queenslanders. The flexible learning options provided by the Queensland Certificate of Education have also seen a 62.5 per cent decrease in the number of students completing year 12 without obtaining an educational or VET certificate or both. That is a remarkable improvement. In 2006 the number of students in this category was 4,367; in 2008 it was just 1,639. This means that there is a greater number of students who will have options for the future, be they tertiary studies, training or picking up a trade. The QCE has encouraged more young students to diversify their learning and has resulted in an increase in students receiving VET qualifications.

While there has been a slight decline in the number of students receiving an OP, importantly this decrease only occurs in lower level OPs, which means that students are increasingly finding that their pathways to success may not be found in universities but with trades and training—a point I was making to the member for Gladstone earlier. The flexibility of the government's schooling pathways is an important step toward helping students make their mark outside school, and can I emphasise, in whatever educational direction they are best suited to and for them to pursue excellence in the way that is most appropriate for them.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Minister, SDS page 3-105 refers to energy efficiency measures that the department has undertaken. Can you explain what measures your department has taken to reduce water consumption?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I say, climate change is an issue that the opposition struggles to come to terms with. But no doubt you, Mr Chairman, are aware that we need to take action to meet the challenge of climate change. The Bligh government is delivering on its commitment to place Queensland front and centre in the fight against climate change. We know it is real. We do not deny that it exists. We know that we have to take action to combat its effect. That is why my department established a \$60 million three-year Solar and Energy Efficiency in State Schools Program for all Queensland state schools' environmental and outdoor education centres. The full program of installation of solar and energy efficiencies for all schools commenced this year. At its height the program will see projected energy savings of approximately 30 per cent per annum.

Our TAFEs are joining the fight as well. From July 2003 to June 2008 TAFE Queensland achieved savings of \$4.5 million by purchasing electricity through market contracts for its largest electricity accounts. I am coming to water, but lighting upgrades at Mount Isa, Ingham and Gladstone campuses, completed progressively in 2008, have subsequently averaged savings of 10.5 per cent per annum.

The Department of Education and Training has proved to be equally effective in reducing consumption of our water, our most precious resource. It is both an energy and a water strategy of attack on climate change. The department's School Water Efficiency Program achieved a reduction in water consumption across the state of 53 per cent in 2007-08 compared to the baseline year of 2004-05. We are meeting our commitments to comply with Queensland Water Commission requirements of 25 per cent reduction or best practice by November 2008. Schools in the Queensland Water Commission zones achieved water savings of 64 per cent in 2007-08 compared to the baseline year of 2004-05. That is a remarkable improvement. State-wide, schools achieved savings of 53 per cent over the same period. That is interesting given that they are outside the formal South-East Queensland water-saving and conservation strategy.

Water consumption across six South-East Queensland TAFE institutes decreased by 67 per cent in 2007-08 compared with 2004-05. State-wide, TAFE institutes achieved savings of 54 per cent over the same period. This is another perfect example of how the Bligh government is delivering on our commitments and saving our environment at the same time. Whilst on the other side of the chamber the opposition struggles to agree on the existence of climate change, we are getting on with the job of fighting it.

CHAIR: I call the member for Everton.

Mr WATT: I would like to ask you a question about one of the government's most important reforms of recent years and that is its introduction of universal early childhood education. I refer you to page 3-100 of the SDS. The government's blueprint for Queensland, Toward Q2, focuses on targets to ensure that universal access to kindergarten can be achieved in Queensland. Can the minister please inform the committee how the government is working with key stakeholders to achieve these targets?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. Not only have you for a long time had a keen interest in the policy area that you have drawn attention to; you now experience the importance of this area most personally with your young family. Young George can look forward to opportunities in early childhood education in the years ahead under the Bligh government. We are committed to meeting our commitments of giving all Queensland children the flying start that they deserve. We know that the early years are vital to a child's success at school and in life, and that is why we are providing quality kindergarten programs taught by qualified early childhood teachers.

We are on the road to providing universal access to a kindergarten program for all 3½- to 4½-year-old children in Queensland as part of the 'flying start' election commitment. Offering programs run by highly trained teachers is a key aspect of this strategy because we know that professional early childhood teachers play a crucial role in preparing Queensland kids for school and life. In Queensland, registration with the Queensland College of Teachers ensures teacher quality. That is why I am committed to looking into options for formally recognising teachers working in early childhood education settings under legislation.

Currently the Queensland College of Teachers Act formally recognises under legislation teaching experience in schools for full registration purposes. Recognition of teachers in ECEC settings occurs only under board policy and is currently limited to those teaching an approved program who are seeking full registration. I would like to see this formalised in legislation and extended to provide suitably qualified teachers in ECEC settings the same recognition as teachers in schools. This would enable teachers to work across ECEC settings and schools without having to complete a return-to-school program. This will provide greater mobility for schoolteachers wishing to teach in an ECEC setting as well as stronger linkages between Queensland's kindergarten program and the early years of schooling.

These changes will also provide the Queensland community with confidence in the quality of kindergarten programs because of the qualified teachers educating these young children. A number of key early childhood education and key stakeholder groups, employers and unions alike, support a move to recognise, through the board's registration processes, professionally qualified early childhood teachers regardless of where they work. The input that ECEC teachers have in giving Queensland children a flying start to education should not go unnoticed. Providing the best possible start for

Queensland children through quality early childhood education is a priority for the government. That is why we are investing more than \$300 million rolling out 240 extra kindergarten services throughout the state by 2014.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Moggill.

Mr WILSON: If I may, I have some further information in response to two questions that you asked earlier. I am happy to provide that to the committee at this point.

In relation to asbestos flooring at Chapel Hill State School, I am advised by my department that the greater Brisbane regional facilities staff became aware of asbestos flooring concerns on 26 June 2009 following a report by a parent. Testing has now been conducted on the administration block, the tuckshop, teaching blocks 2 and 3 and the library block. All floors tested with the exception of teaching block 3 were confirmed to have asbestos-containing material. The original facilities team has requested quotes from QBuild to replace the vinyl flooring. It is intended that the flooring that has asbestos-containing material in poor condition will be replaced in the next school holiday period in September 2009. QBuild was instructed by the Department of Education and Training facilities staff to make the flooring in these buildings safe. This has been completed, so we are advised, in accordance with QBuild's make safe procedures.

In 2007-08 during the Christmas-new year vacation period an inspection was undertaken by QBuild of all vinyl flooring throughout the state to conduct make safe repairs to ensure that any vinyl flooring with asbestos-containing material was fully encapsulated in accordance with QBuild's procedures. The Chapel Hill State School was included in this process and make safe repairs were conducted on 16 January 2008, I am advised. The scheduled three-yearly asbestos condition assessment for Chapel Hill State School was conducted on 29 May 2008.

I am certainly happy to make a relevant officer available to the honourable member later if there is further detail that he would like. On the instructions that I have at this point it does appear that action is underway and make safe efforts have been completed. But as I say, safety is a first priority for teachers and children at schools. If there be any remaining issue, I am quite happy to ensure the department has a look at it.

I am sorry, there is a second matter for the honourable member, Dr Flegg, if I may respond to that as well. You raised a question about the Mount Crosby State School and its involvement with the P21 project. I am advised that it is in round 3 of P21—there are three rounds. This is all structured and set by the federal government about which we do not have a choice. Every Queensland primary school is eligible for BER funding based upon their enrolments. The Australian government required 40 per cent of projects to be done in round 3—obviously, 60 per cent across rounds 1 and 2. Round 3 has not yet been approved by the Australian government. All of the bids are in from each of the schools as I understand it. The school has applied for a library for \$1.2 million and a sports hall for \$1.8 million. The school has put forward plans for non-standard designs of a two-storey complex. The P&C and school have both signed off on the proposal before submitting it to the Australian government, which is the proper thing to do.

The Queensland government is encouraging school involvement in the design and planning process as long as, ultimately, it meets the Australian government's guidelines because they are the guidelines we have to work within and, as you would expect, it remains within budget. Further detailed planning, I am advised, will take place once round 3 is announced for each school if a project is approved by the Australian government.

There is a further response, if I may with the leave of the committee, relating to a question asked by Mrs Cunningham in relation to the TAFE Gladstone campus. In response to the question asked by the member for Gladstone regarding the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE Gladstone campus I have been advised by my department that the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE has a planned government investment in training for 2009-10 of approximately \$24 million, an increase of over \$2 million from 2008-09 for the Gladstone campus. An amount of \$5.6 million of this government investment has been allocated for 2009-10, an increase of \$500,000 from 2008-09. The Gladstone campus had 96 full-time equivalent staff in 2008-09, which has increased to 96.6 full-time equivalent staff in 2009-10. So there is a very small increase in FTE. However, there is, I am advised, a 13 per cent increase in training hours for the Gladstone campus for 2009-10 as a result of increased demand, which is able to be accommodated within the current staffing structure. I hope that satisfies the member's inquiry.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, in relation to training, reference page 3-108, given that you have committed to the extraordinary number of 148,000 additional training places, your budget papers reveal that the VET teachers and staff numbered 7,224 in 2007-08, 7,155 in 2008-09 and 7,261 in 2009-10. How is it that you can create this extraordinary number of training positions with virtually no additional teaching staff?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. I am delighted that you are raising a question about training. This is an area that historically has suffered, regrettably, because of a high level of disinterest by the opposition, I have to say. I have followed training for many years because of my previous occupations. I know that the opposition has very little interest in training. At the federal level it had very little interest in training. Indeed, when the opposition was last—

Dr FLEGG: There is plenty of interest here, Minister.

Mr WILSON: When the opposition was last in power it set about dismantling the TAFE system in Queensland. When the opposition was in power federally, it set about withdrawing funding from the TAFE system and what little funding was left to be put into the state TAFE system was being used as a lever to implement WorkChoices legislation in Queensland, ensuring that each teacher working in the TAFE system was employed on an individual contract. If the opposition spokesman has an interest in training, then I welcome it. It would be a singular and dramatic departure from the past.

We are absolutely committed to making sure that we build the skills base of Queensland workers for the improving economy, which will take place in the years ahead. Make no mistake about it. That is why we have set these ambitious targets, and they are funded targets. We will leave no stone unturned in making sure that we pursue as vigorously as possible these ambitious targets.

I underline that it is a joint venture with the federal government and the state government in funding these places, because for the first time in nearly a generation we are able to combine strongly with a federal government that recognises that long-term strategic planning for skills formation is vital for the growth of Queensland, let alone the Australian, economy.

Yes, we are going to be focused on training more people who can actually teach in the TAFE and further education sector and bringing more teachers online with the appropriate skills and expertise and, particularly, the experience coming out of the workforce which can be an absolutely vital addition to the teaching quality of the TAFE sector. As I say, we will continue and we will do the appropriate workforce planning that is underway. We will use whatever different delivery models may be needed to ensure that we pursue vigorously these targets. We will work closely with industry—and that is the other big thing about the TAFE sector. We will do this in partnership with the strong involvement of the private sector, because they make the difference.

Dr FLEGG: Again, in relation to training, minister, page 3-103—

Mr WILSON: That is probably about three questions in four months on training—and two today. Thank you, Dr Flegg.

Dr FLEGG: I have got more. Your government committed \$124 million over four years to 148,000 additional training places between 1 January 2009 and 30 June 2012. However, your total targets for VET places over the past three years have barely changed. Last year 297,000 was the upper limit of places, this year again it is 297,000 and next year's target is 300,000. There does not really appear to be any significant increase in VET places. Is this promise of all these additional training places really a promise that has already been broken?

Mr WILSON: When you look at the record of the opposition, you went to the last state election promising to abolish 36,000 jobs—

Dr FLEGG: We are actually trying to have a look at your record.

Mr WILSON: We went to the election, as you did, but we did not go to the election promising to abolish 36,000 jobs, firstly. Secondly, we did not go to the election, like your party did, promising that you would slash public works expenditure, which would itself bring about a significant loss of jobs. You would have also destroyed the 10 per cent policy that the government has had in place and which we have decided to ramp up to be a lot more effective than what it has been in the past. It sounds quite strange for you to have this so-called interest in training and that you are so critical of the government setting ambitious targets.

This government has made training, without any doubt, a key priority and a commitment for the future. I can tell you, we are going to focus on that and we are going to work closely. We will do whatever we need to do to pursue those targets. We will do so despite the opposition standing on the sideline throwing rocks at this most important initiative. We are going to look after young Queenslanders who are either in a trade now and need to be kept in a trade so they can complete the trade or who need to get into a trade or other traineeship so that they have just as much an opportunity as children who are successful at school and go on to university to have the grounding of a good education, employment opportunities and the lifestyle that everyone is entitled to enjoy.

You can stand on the side, knocking and criticising, but we are going to get on with the job. Our priorities are to build and create jobs in Queensland. We are going to keep investing in the delivery of vital front-line education services. We are going to keep investing in young Queenslanders because it is their future and the future of the Queensland economy and the Queensland community that is at stake. That is why we are going to keep investing in them.

If I can give you an example of how the system works—and we should offer to you the opportunity at a later time for a full induction into the training area so that you are better acquainted with how the system works—productivity places is one package of delivering training. It is a joint Commonwealth-state initiative. From 1 January 2009 to 30 June 2012 the Queensland government will invest \$124 million. The program aims to deliver 102,000 additional training places to existing Queensland workers and 46,000 for Queensland job seekers.

CHAIR: Order! The time for answering that question has expired. Does the minister seek an extension?

Mr WILSON: Yes, I will seek an expansion. Thank you very much and thank you, Dr Flegg—

CHAIR: Member for Moggill, do you—

Dr FLEGG: I would prefer to move on because we have already lost time.

CHAIR: The member for Moggill prefers to move on.

Mr WILSON: I am happy to keep informing the honourable member about training that he knows so little about.

CHAIR: I call the member for Moggill.

Mr WILSON: I offer myself and remain ready, willing and able to do so.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Moggill.

Mr WILSON: It does take a long time to get some things through for some people.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, I have a question on training for you. I am sure you will be pleased. In relation to the number of apprenticeships and training places, I point out that last year your predecessor promised \$17.1 million to create 4,250 additional trade training places in 2008-09 and 17,000 by 2010. In reality, the number of apprenticeship commencements nosedived from 66,000 to only 58,000, and your forward estimate contained in this budget is for no increase at all in apprenticeship commencements rather than the promised additional 12½ thousand that should have been funded under this original commitment. Has this original commitment been conveniently forgotten in this budget? Is this not just another promise to young people seeking apprenticeships that has been broken?

Mr WILSON: In the absence of the Bligh government, there would be nothing but a vacuum if the opposition were in power when it comes to training. I can assure you of that. What we are prepared to do is identify good targets that are designed to make sure that all our efforts are focused upon skilling young Queenslanders. The other thing that needs to be recognised is that the government, through the TAFE sector and the registered training organisations, works closely with the private sector in delivering training opportunities, both apprenticeships and traineeships. By its nature it reflects the challenges and opportunities that are experienced industry sector by industry sector, month by month, with the economic cycle overlaid on that.

Do not come to this hearing with these artificial perspectives on training. This is one of those arenas that closely mirrors the challenges and the opportunities that are experienced within industry arising out of whether we are in a boom period or in a bust period. We will continue to work closely with industry in supplying them the services that they ask us for.

In relation to commencements, for 2008-09 they were anticipated to be 58,000. They are down approximately 18 per cent against the 2008-09 target of 70,000 to 72,000. Compared to the previous year there was a significant decrease in the uptake of apprenticeships and there was a moderate decrease in traineeship commencements over the second half of 2008 and early 2009. Compared to this time last year, the number of apprentices in training is down by 7.5 per cent despite the sharp decrease in apprenticeship commencements. This is a result of high growth in apprenticeship commencements over the previous few years and the fact that many apprentices will remain in the system for some time while they are completing training. They are mostly four-year apprenticeships.

The department offers a range of support services to assist employers, apprentices and trainees during their training contract. In addition, there have been ongoing modifications, as explained by the assistant deputy director-general for training, and improvements to regulatory and administrative arrangements to provide streamlined and simplified processes for parties to the training contract. The role of marketing and promoting apprenticeships and traineeships is performed by Australian apprenticeship centres, which are contracted by the Australian government to provide a one-stop shop for those seeking to employ apprentices or trainees or to undertake an apprenticeship.

CHAIR: The time for the minister to answer the question has expired.

Dr FLEGG: In go back to education. In answer to a question on notice you indicated that 25,568 Queensland students are in oversized classes, and it is not getting any better. I am still quite amazed that in this setting we would have only one permanent teaching job advertised throughout the whole state. What are we doing to get these class sizes down so that we do not have 25,568 students in oversized classes?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. In a moment I will have a departmental officer address the specific detail that you appear to be turning your mind to at this point. Before I do that, can we address the question of class sizes. You have been in the public arena in time past suggesting that there is an issue with class sizes that is far bigger than it really is.

I can give you some figures. The class sizes are 25 for years P to 3, 28 for years 4 to 10, and 25 for years 11 and 12. In terms of class sizes for the early phase, in 2009 some 93.3 per cent were on target. That means that 4.6 per cent were off target. I wonder how many students were over the target. In each class it was one. Let us go to the middle phase of schooling. For 94.7 per cent of classes in the middle phase of schooling the class size target was met. For 3.2 per cent of classes there was an excess. By how many? They were one student over the target of 28 students. In the senior phase of schooling 95.5 per cent of classes fitted the target of 25 students and 2.5 per cent of classes were in excess of the target. How many students were they in excess in each class where they were in excess? They were one student in excess of 25.

Let us make sure that we keep the statistics in perspective. Why are classes in excess of the class size targets that I have just enumerated by one, two or three students? Schools may elect to form classes that exceed the established class size targets for a range of reasons including, firstly, to keep the students of the same year level together rather than forming a multiage or composite class across different year levels; secondly, to create smaller classes to support a range of school based initiatives designed to support or enhance student learning outcomes—for example, a smaller class created to work with students who require more intensive or focused literacy and numeracy support or to support behaviour management initiatives; thirdly, where post day 8 enrolment growth or enrolment changes are experienced by the school after classes have been formed and settled and the principal decides not to restructure classes in the interests of minimising disruption to students; and, fourthly, where secondary schools opt for an elective type approach where some larger classes are supported by smaller tutorial groups. My director-general may add something to this.

CHAIR: The time for answering that question has expired. The time allocated for questions by non-government members has also expired. The committee will now focus its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Training on the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care. I will allow a moment for officials from that office to attend at the front table should they wish to.

Mr WILSON: Just for clarification, I notice the way the committee has arranged the time. I appreciate the interest the committee has in early childhood education. I just note that it may be that other questions are asked of other areas of my portfolio. Therefore, given that that is a possibility, I will ask all relevant departmental staff to remain present to provide the maximum opportunity to assist the committee should one or more other questions be asked unrelated to early childhood education and care.

Mrs SCOTT: Queenslanders living in rural and remote areas often face barriers to access support and other services. Can the minister please inform the committee what this government is doing to ensure that kids in rural and remote areas can access kindy?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to provide access to a quality early childhood education to all 3½- to 4½-year-olds, including those living in rural and remote areas. We are currently planning for a range of mobile and outreach services that will enable Queensland kids living in geographically isolated areas to access kindy under our commitment to provide universal access. My department has been working in close partnership with key stakeholders through the kindergarten implementation unique solutions working group to ensure that kids are not disadvantaged because of where they live.

We have been working with the federal government to trial five mobile kindy services across Queensland. In addition, we are investigating options for other service delivery solutions including outreach services. Our mobile kindy trial services cover a broad range of remote and urban areas including: Carpentaria Community Kindergarten in the gulf, Julia Creek Kindergarten and Child Care Centre, Richmond Early Education Centre in the far north-west; Southern South East Queensland Family Day Care at Woodridge, C&K Carole Park Community Child Care Centre and Redbank Plains Child Care Centre in the south-east metropolitan area; and Surat Limited Hours Child Care Centre and Injune Community Kindergarten and Child Care Centre in the south-west.

We are committed to every child receiving a quality early childhood education program. We know that the provision of early childhood education is already having an effect in Indigenous communities. The most recent federal government Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report showed that this is one area in which we are having some success.

Our Bound for Success program is providing pre-prep early learning programs in 35 Indigenous communities. That is an investment of \$16.7 million in capital works and \$3.3 million in recurrent funding for 2009-10. Investment in these communities has been rewarded, with 70 per cent of children in remote areas accessing quality early childhood education programs. In urban areas it is around 10 per cent. That is remarkable. We are committed to ensuring that all Queensland children can access a quality early childhood education program no matter where they live. These programs are helping us to reach those goals.

Mr RYAN: Minister, how are early childhood education and care services being integrated with other services to support vulnerable Queensland families?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is committed to providing world-class early education and care and integrating these services with health, family support and other services to create one-stop shops of support or early years centres, EYCs. We are establishing four EYCs which form a crucial part of our substantial investments in the early years. We are pumping \$32 million over four years to fund this initiative. Centre locations are at Nerang, Caboolture, Browns Plains and Cairns. Caboolture and Nerang have been operational from 2008 and Browns Plains is due to open later this year. Providing these services is part of the government meeting its commitment to invest in early intervention strategies.

We know that social problems and health issues can contribute to student learning suffering in the later years. Socioeconomic disadvantage can have a stark effect on children's literacy and numeracy skills, something we have seen reflected in national testing results. It is our responsibility to do all we can to address these issues early by supporting vulnerable families. We want all Queensland children to get a flying start in life so that they have the best possible chance to succeed at school. Having access to services such as this means potential issues can be identified and addressed early on. We can help parents help their children. That might mean identifying health issues such as hearing problems to ensure that students get appropriate help before and after they start school or linking families with programs to boost their parenting skills, for example.

We expect to help up to 4,000 families each year through these centres and to provide an early childhood education and care service linked with additional support services for some of Queensland's most vulnerable families. Each centre will have at least two satellite services and will be designed to meet the needs of the specific community in which it is located. The creation of early year centres is just another example of the Bligh government meeting its commitment to giving Queensland children a flying start.

CHAIR: Minister, the Australian government recently provided over \$9 million for the establishment of five early learning and care centres. Can the minister please update the committee on the progress of the centres and the role that the Queensland government has played in establishing them?

Mr WILSON: I would be delighted to do so, and I thank the honourable member for the question. We have been working hard to deliver the biggest reforms to early childhood education since prep. Through new early learning and care centres—yet another acronym, ELCCs—long day care with an embedded kindergarten program will be delivered, providing at least 50 places per centre for local families. We have been working in partnership with the Australian government to establish four of these five centres—Amberley, Townsville, Cairns and in the member for Gladstone's electorate. Each centre will be tailored to the individual needs of the community. The centre in Amberley is proposed to be co-located with our brand-new Amberley State School at Yamanto. We have publicly requested proposals for Townsville and Gladstone to identify local care needs, possible sites and assurances about the ongoing viability of the proposed service for each of these locations. We are in negotiation with the Queensland Catholic Education Commission to establish the Cairns centre, for example, at St Andrew's college at Redlynch. These centres will provide quality care as well as a quality learning program to prepare some of our youngest Queenslanders for school.

The government recognises the crucial role early childhood education plays in a child's development and in their later success in school. That is why we are committed to providing universal access to quality early learning programs and it is one of our Toward Q2 goals for 2020. We want to ensure that all Queensland children have access to a quality kindergarten program taught by a qualified early years teacher. We are working with the federal government to implement early years reforms and delivering on our government's commitment to roll out 240 extra kindergarten services by 2014.

Our investment in early learning of up to \$889 million is an investment in Queensland's future. We know that a solid foundation will help boost education outcomes for students later in life. There are currently about 53,000 kindy-aged children in Queensland but only 12,000 of them attend kindergarten where a qualified early childhood teacher delivers a recognised education program. Another 29,000 children attend child-care centres, but less than 10 per cent of these have access to an education program delivered by a qualified early childhood teacher. Good nonetheless that the teaching and the care that they are receiving in those centres is, but I am focusing here on the education of early childhood education teachers. We are meeting our commitments to changing that by continuing to invest in early childhood education.

Mr WATT: Minister, last year the Bligh government committed to the rollout of 240 kindergartens and a quality early childhood education program for all 3½- to 4½-year-olds. Can the minister please update the committee on where this is up to?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. We are focused on meeting our commitment to providing universal access to kindergarten with an investment, as I mentioned earlier, of \$889 million over five years, including over \$300 million—I think it is about \$320 million—for the

construction of the extra kindergarten services. We are on track to open eight new kindergartens in 2010 at Seaforth, Beaconsfield, Oonoonba, Redlynch, Mudgeeraba, Stretton, Moorooka and Everton Hills, and I note that the member for Everton and the member for Barron River will see new kindies in their electorates under the first year of the program. An additional 12 kindies will open, however, in 2011 and, as the member for Woodridge will know, this includes a new kindy at Crestmead State School in her electorate.

These first 20 kindergartens will provide the model for the next 200 or so new, extended or refurbished kindergarten services to be progressed between 2012 and 2014. The rollout is underway for the first stage of our kindies, and we will undertake further planning for the remainder which will be based on a thorough assessment of local need—and I underline local need—population and existing services, because this is designed to complement the work being done already within the private sector. We are working to find sites that are co-located with schools to give our youngest Queenslanders the smoothest transition possible from kindy to prep. We are also looking at the potential to add an extra unit to existing kindergartens where there is significant unmet need in the area. This will also double the capacity of the state's existing community kindergarten sector.

This policy is a part of a far-reaching education project to provide all Queensland children with access to high-quality early education before they start school. These are services that Dr Flegg and his colleagues frankly were not willing to support. The Liberal National Party opposed this program, I remind honourable members, calling it a recipe for disaster and vowing to scrap it. But that should come as no surprise, because that would be another form of the capital works freeze and slashing of jobs that was proposed at the last state election. The opposition regrettably does not see how Queenslanders can benefit from creating an extra 900 teaching jobs over the next five years, providing universal access to kindergarten and creating more than 2,500 jobs for the construction of these 240 kindergarten services. This, I believe, is one of the most important initiatives that the government will continue to be focused on because we are focused on meeting our commitments. We recognise that early childhood education is going to lay the foundation of the foundations for education into the traditional school sector and higher in the years ahead.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, children are one of our most precious assets and ensuring that they are safe should be a key priority. Can the minister please explain what the government is doing to regulate the early childhood sector to ensure that our kids are safe?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The government has been working with the federal government through COAG to improve national quality assurances for the early childhood education and care sector. We want to make sure that children are provided with high-quality care and early education and that parents are better informed about the services that their children are receiving. We prioritise the safety of all children, and that is why we are reviewing our Child Care Act. The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to increase openness and transparency. We believe parents have a right to know whether the centre their child attends is meeting standards in complying with the act. The role of the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care is to monitor and regulate the sector, and it is a role that it takes seriously.

We are committed to working as well with COAG to develop national consistency in regulation. Later this year COAG will confirm the national policy directions for reform, including a new national standard for quality early childhood care and education. Our legislative reforms will align with these standards. Queensland is at the forefront of quality care and has been deeply involved in the push to ensure that COAG takes a tough stance on ensuring the quality of ECEC services. The proposed quality standards are currently under public consultation as we speak through a regulatory impact statement that was jointly developed by this government along with the federal government and the other states. The regulatory impact statement proposes major reforms around issues including staff qualifications and staff-to-child ratios.

The Bligh government is committed to working cooperatively with the Commonwealth to deliver clear and consistent national quality standards—a feat that, I regret to say, could never have been achieved under the previous Howard government despite the best efforts of all of the states that nonetheless were left to work together at the Council for the Australian Federation because they could not get the heavy lifting done at a federal level. These quality standards represent just part of some of the most significant reforms to the ECEC sector in our country's history.

The national quality agenda consists of four key elements: firstly, new national quality standards to provide clear and consistent standards in the sector across Australia; secondly, and important for parents, a quality rating system to better inform parents of the quality of the services that are being provided; thirdly, a national regulatory approach to streamline licensing, regulation and quality assurance requirements and to reduce the administrative burden on services; and, fourthly and finally, the national Early Years Learning Framework to provide a guidance for educators to deliver quality learning programs for children from birth to five years.

Mr RYAN: Minister, research has shown that early intervention is a key tool for closing the gap in Indigenous education outcomes. What initiatives has the government implemented to ensure that Indigenous children are ready for school?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is meeting its commitment to provide a pre-prep or kindy program for Indigenous children under its Bound for Success initiative. Under the initiative, this government is delivering pre-prep programs across 35 discrete Indigenous communities resulting in more than 70 per cent of pre-prep aged Indigenous children in remote areas accessing a quality early childhood education before starting prep. We are working to not only meet our commitments under the strategy but also close the gap and to provide universal access to kindergarten for some of Queensland's most vulnerable children.

The government will continue to work with the ECEC sector to develop strategies to ensure that support is tailored to the needs of Indigenous children and their families. The *Foundations for success: guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities* document has been developed to help teachers provide a culturally appropriate early childhood education program. The government is also working with the federal government to establish nine Indigenous children and family support centres which will deliver integrated early childhood education and parenting and family support. These centres will be rolled out in both urban and rural areas.

The government is committed to improving developmental outcomes for Indigenous children under the Indigenous early childhood development national partnership and is delivering the ICFCs—the centres that is—under this agreement. This government prioritises closing the gap in Indigenous education outcomes. We are working to ensure that our youngest Indigenous children are given a flying start to education regardless of where they live. I recently launched the department's new Closing the Gap Education Strategy, which sets bold targets to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.

These targets are stepping stones to help us achieve the federal government's broader COAG targets. Our aim is to halve the gap in year 3 reading and numeracy by 2012, close the gap in student education by 2013 and close the gap in year 12 retention by 2013. With these ambitious targets in mind, we are focusing on the following critical areas: targeting early years and getting children to school and keeping them at school. We are setting the bar high, that is true, but it is vital that we set high expectations for all Queensland students.

CHAIR: The time for answering the question has expired and the time allocated for questions by government has expired. I call the member for Moggill.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, in relation to early childhood and the teacher qualifications that you alluded to and also in relation to TAFE students in early childhood—and I refer to page 3-116 of the SDS—in answer to question on notice No. 611 of 2009 you stated that there were 3,475 students enrolled in TAFE courses for early childhood training at the end of May 2009. Given that we all understand that your expansion of early childhood education in kindergarten is to be staffed by university qualified early childhood teachers, just what career options will be open to those thousands of TAFE students? How do you propose to find enough university graduates in early childhood to staff an additional 240 kindergartens?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. We certainly are embarking on an ambitious strategy. We are focused on meeting these ambitious targets, because we know that this is one of the most important areas in which to target government investment and government action.

I am advised that the department has committed \$48 million over three years to the implementation of the Children's Services Skilling Plan. That is a suite of training and engagement strategies to support the attainment of mandated qualifications by new and existing staff in the licensed children's services that exist in Queensland now. It has been a highly successful strategy and it is supported by more than 5,850 new and existing child-care staff achieving approved qualifications. So we are focusing very much on the existing workforce as well as on new people coming into the sector.

Building on this success, a workforce action plan is being developed by the department, which includes a focus on skilling the workforce to assist in implementing the national and the state early childhood qualification reforms. We will continue to increase the number of qualified staff across Queensland, with a focus on upgrading the skills of Indigenous staff as well in remote communities.

The government is considering a range of other initiatives to assist in meeting the universal access objectives, including annual scholarships, for example, from next year for existing early childhood professionals to upgrade their qualifications over the next five years. Scholarships will also substantially reduce HECS fees for students and recognise current staff expertise within the long day care sector. It is important to recognise that this is one of those sectors where upskilling has enormous potential to identify the gaps in formal training so that, with the gap training that can be made available, the existing workforce can be in a position to have a great opportunity to get formally recognised what they have learned in the school of hard knocks by being employed for many, many years in the early childhood area.

We will help also address the estimated extra 900 or so full-time equivalent teachers who will be required over the next five years to deliver on this commitment. Consultation is currently underway on a range of proposed national quality reforms, as I was reporting earlier, including the workforce and skilling strategy.

CHAIR: The time for answering that question has expired.

Mr WILSON: Mr Chairman, I also have a further response to a question asked by the member for Gladstone. I do not know whether the member intends asking another question so I do not quite know when to provide that. So with respect to Dr Flegg, I am in the chairman's hands as to when I provide that further information.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I will be asking some questions later this afternoon.

CHAIR: Perhaps if you can give that further answer during the course of an answer to a question asked by the member for Gladstone.

Mr WILSON: I am happy to do that.

Dr FLEGG: Minister, currently there are 340 kindergartens in Queensland providing access, as you said, to fewer than a third of children. It seems that that would require around 1,000 kindergartens to meet the Q2 target of making it available to everyone. That is an additional 640. You promised 240. I do not see that the maths add up to providing access to everyone. Just in the course of your answer, Minister, if you could clarify for me, from what I understood you to say in the last answer, the kindy teachers in these kindergartens will not necessarily be university qualified. That is what I understood you to say, if you could clarify that.

Mr WILSON: I thank you for the question. Your numbers do not add up. The department has been working closely with the sector on the whole range of national reforms that are being rolled out centrally across the country and in close collaboration with the Queensland government. Shortly I will ask the chief executive officer of the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care to respond more particularly to your question.

There is no doubt that this is a major reform in this area and we are going to be providing a range of initiatives to assist in both the upskilling and the training of new entrants into the sector, because we know that this is a vital area of reform that must be pursued relentlessly to provide that further foundation upon which the prep year is based and then the schooling system is based. It is well documented across Australia and internationally that if we can make a big impact upon the 3½ to 4½ year old cohort in the education sector, then that will transfer through the schooling sector as well in improved literacy, numeracy, science and other outcomes and achievements. Indeed, looking at Queensland's experience historically against the other states, that is well and truly borne out.

When the NAPLAN results came out in 2008, there were some observations about the various reasons there would be differences in Queensland measured against the other states. We have not focused on that. We are getting on with the job of implementing the report from Professor Masters. But it is a point of distinction nonetheless between Queensland and the other states that we have relatively fewer numbers of students in that 3½ to 4½ year bracket. I will ask Ms Johnston to respond more particularly to your question.

Ms Johnston: The strategy for universal access has a number of prongs to it. There are the existing community kindergartens—there are 363 existing community kindergartens. The other key plank of the strategy is to enable the 29,000 children who are in long day care centres to be able to access a kindergarten program within long day care. So when you consider the existing 363 community kindergartens, when you consider that we will be delivering or embedding kindergarten into existing child-care centres, you end up with a gap of around about 12,000 children of the age cohort who are not currently accessing care. It is those children not in a—

CHAIR: Minister, do you wish to seek an extension of time?

Mr WILSON: Yes, if I could.

Dr FLEGG: Yes.

CHAIR: Please continue.

Ms Johnston: Thank you. It is those children who are not currently in a community kindergarten, nor attending a child-care service, that the 240 additional kindergarten services actually target.

Dr FLEGG: Page 3-100 of the SDS, the third dot point, states that research shows that quality education early in life gives children the best start. How do you reconcile that with page 3-112 which shows in the performance statement that attendance by Indigenous students in the prep year actually declined by 110 students, despite a strong rise of 1,660 non-Indigenous students?

Mr WILSON: You can draw all sorts of conclusions if you look at one year measured against another year. The fact is—and I reported on it to the committee earlier in the proceedings today—that one of the biggest successes that the government is having and, more importantly, those working in the sector, not so much the government directly, has been lifting the attendance rate of Indigenous students in the pre-prep years, if I have heard your question correctly, in the 3½ to 4½—

Dr FLEGG: I asked for prep.

Mr WILSON: The pre-prep area, the kindy area—3½ to 4½. Indeed, in the Productivity Commission report that was handed down about three weeks ago and released at a meeting of COAG there were two programs in Queensland which they targeted as things that work. There is a whole section called 'Things that Work' in the Productivity Commission report on a range of factors affecting

Indigenous communities and Indigenous people. One of the two things that they focused on in Queensland was the success of the Bound for Success strategy of pre-prep—or kindy—in the 35 discrete Indigenous communities. They prosecuted vigorously in their document how successful that program has been such that, as I was saying earlier, approximately 70 per cent of eligible students in that cohort are actually attending the pre-prep year.

So figures will vary from year to year. The raw number can vary from year to year and one can seek to extrapolate from those, if you like, but the fact is that this is one of the programs that an independent federal government Productivity Commission has reported and said so positively that it is one of the two things that they see as working in Queensland. The other is the Deadly Ears program, which is mostly run out of the department of health, but in conjunction with the department of education and other agencies. They are saying that this is working as well.

Indigenous education, and more broadly Indigenous health and welfare, is one of the most challenging areas that faces that sector and government of any persuasion, frankly. What is so commendable about the Productivity Commission's report is that it has identified things that work, because what we need to be doing is more of the things that work. One of the things that is working is pre-prep in the 35 Indigenous communities and we are going to keep pushing ahead with it.

Dr FLEGG: With reference to page 3-112 in the SDS, the performance statement, you have only one continuing measure of Indigenous reading, writing and numeracy, which is for year 2. Isn't it scandalous that this most vulnerable group in our community appears to be going backwards in their ability to read, write and add up on the only continuing measure that you have included for us?

Mr WILSON: It is well recognised across the country that it is the years before year 3 at school for children generally, but more particularly Indigenous children, where we need to target our impact the most, because all of the research shows that in later years the gap in educational outcomes remains fairly static between Indigenous and non-Indigenous. It first establishes its regrettably intransigent position in those early years.

Talk to any commentator, as I did with a professor from Sydney university specialising in Indigenous issues the other day, along with a ministerial colleague from New South Wales. They reinforced to me—which they did not need to, but I accepted the point—that the focus needs to be on those very early years. That is where we are also focusing our efforts. The figures that are published by any commentator, or in any federal or state government document in the area of Indigenous education, are an absolute wake-up call; make no mistake about it. That is why we are going to be meeting our commitments in the Indigenous education area. That is why we are spending unprecedented funds in the Indigenous education area. That is why we are going to be rolling out the education plan that was released a week or so ago, working in close collaboration with Chris Sarra and other well-recognised Indigenous educators and other educators within the Indigenous community.

I cannot underline more heavily how much we need to continue our focus on the things that do work within Indigenous education. It is not only the pre-prep years but also the years between pre-prep and year 3 that need to be targeted. But the area in which to make the big changes is in investing, through the holistic approaches that are being taken, in the early years care centres for children from birth and into their early years. In the Indigenous community there is a holistic approach being rolled out by the department of health and also by the department of Indigenous affairs around looking after young people and their families in this very vulnerable age group.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Bullying is recognised as a major problem in schools. Early intervention and early training are also recognised as more effective approaches to problem solving. With that in mind, what programs are to be funded in the early childhood education area to combat the bullying problem?

Mr WILSON: I thank you for raising this question, member for Gladstone. It is an important area generally across the education sector and is well recognised by the government. We are committed to ensuring that the safety, health and welfare of students at our state education schools and centres are the first priority. They have to be the first priority for understandable reasons. But from an educational point of view they have to be the first priority because we want to ensure that the teaching and learning space for students, including in the younger years, is the best that can be provided for the educational experience that we want students to have. That will of course then play through in terms of lifting attainment and achievement of students in that sector.

Appropriate behaviour within the schooling sector and within the prep and pre-prep centres is something that we want to make sure is given the highest priority. We support the principals who have taken such a strong stand in the recent past with short suspensions, long suspensions and also, in a small number of cases, exclusions from the schooling sector. I support the strong stand that principals have been taking in this area, illustrated by the school based data that I released for the first time in Queensland's history several weeks ago that shows a significant spike in suspensions and exclusions. I want to reinforce the support that I give to principals and their communities setting high expectations about appropriate behaviour and acting to ensure that either that behaviour is met or appropriate alternative strategies for the education of those students is provided.

So three things were happening. Firstly, I called a special meeting of the Statewide Behaviour Committee. I met with them for an hour and I discussed my views and heard their views about opportunities to improve the capacity and power of principals and those in charge of appropriate centres to manage behaviour. Secondly, we are reviewing the responsible behaviour plans. Thirdly, we have appointed, most importantly, an internationally recognised bullying expert, Dr Rigby from Adelaide university. The advice that we seek from him will not be confined to the schooling sector. We will also be asking him for advice about appropriate strategies in the early childhood area.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: In relation to the process to identify new early child-care facilities, will the minister have regard to the needs of small to medium schools and the important role these early child-care facilities play in acting as feeders to the student cohort?

Mr WILSON: Mrs Cunningham, with your permission and with the indulgence of the chair, I have a further answer to the question you raised earlier. In response to the member for Gladstone's earlier question in relation to the Premier's safety net package, I have been advised by my department that there is additional funding of \$875,000 to the Central Queensland Institute of TAFE, including the Gladstone campus, to maintain commencements, to assist cancelled apprenticeships or traineeships and to upskill apprentices and trainees. An allocation is yet to be made to the Gladstone campus of the TAFE. I thought you might be interested in that answer.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Thanks.

Mr WILSON: Could you ask your question again?

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: In relation to the process to identify new early child-care facilities, will the minister have regard to the needs of small to medium schools and the important role these early child-care facilities play in acting as feeders to the school student cohort?

Mr WILSON: The short answer is yes. What we are wanting to do is maximise the connectivity between the early childhood centres and the kindies then into prep and then obviously into the broader schooling system. Of course with Queensland being the state it is—it is so heavily decentralised; 1,251 schools up and down the length and breadth of Queensland—there will be some challenges with smaller schools. It will very much depend upon locality by locality examination of the opportunities. Indeed, it may also be that some of the smaller schools may need to be looked at in a cluster approach with bigger schools rather than every school no matter how small getting the benefit of a kindy service. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that mobile and outreach services are also being trialled. Indeed, I spoke earlier about that. That is to test how that model works. That may also be helpful with smaller schools. Be assured that this is a reform that is happening because there has been close collaboration, and will continue so to be, between Childcare Queensland, the state education system, the Catholic education system and indeed the Creche and Kindergarten Association of Queensland.

The underlying principle is that we want to meet unmet need. That is what it boils down to: we want to meet unmet need. So there is a range of factors that are going to have to be kept in balance. Certainly one of those factors will be accessibility of families to early childhood where there are smaller schools so that we can potentially strengthen some small schools for their longer term future.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. Minister, the collapse of ABC Learning has had a devastating effect on many Queensland families. How has the Queensland government assisted families and the sector to recover from the collapse?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. The government has been helping Queensland families through these very difficult times. In this current economic climate, the November 2008 collapse of ABC Learning had the potential for devastating effects on both working Queensland parents and the child-care sector. The government has worked intensively with the federal government to minimise the impact of the collapse on working families.

The court appointed receiver identified 46 unviable services in Queensland. Out of these there has been only one closure and that is the one at North Quay. We have been working to provide certainty for thousands of families and staff who were directly affected by the collapse. You will understand well, I am sure, the complexity and the challenge of this task.

The Bligh government has assisted families to find alternative care during this period through the Child Care Information Service, which is a component of Smart Service Queensland. In an effort to avoid such a widespread collapse in the future, there are now 10 operators for the remaining 45 licences. We know these are vital services for working parents and they expect high standards from those they charge with caring for their children. That is why the Office for Early Childhood Education and Care regulates and monitors the child-care sector to reassure parents that their children are getting the best possible care. The role of that office is to investigate and act on complaints and work with services to address any issues. The office regulates centre based services, home based family day care and school-age care services.

The Bligh government is also working with the federal government on national standards and regulations. This is a huge step forward from the approach that those opposite took when in government. It took the Goss government to introduce a consistent, state-wide process to monitor minimum quality standards for the child-care sector back in 1991. This government sees early childhood education as a solid foundation for students starting school.

I think parents of the more than 220,000 children in licensed early childhood education and care centres are looking forward and appreciate the support that this government has given to the sector. The Bligh government recognises that this is an important area of government activity, and that is why we are increasing access to these services as one of our Toward Q2 goals. We will continue to meet our commitments.

Mr WATT: Minister, I refer you to page 3-112 of the SDS. The Office for Early Childhood Education and Care is a recent addition to your portfolio. Minister, can you report on the government's commitment to child care in Queensland?

Mr WILSON: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I will not tire from saying, we are committed to reforming the early childhood education and care sector in Queensland. We are committed to ensuring universal access for 3½- to 4½-year-olds but recognise the importance of all types of child care in our community—long day care and kindergartens.

Early intervention is a key to switching on young minds to give our children a flying start for school and life. I recently saw a wonderful example of this when I had the opportunity to visit the Logan TAFE Community Child Care Centre. I enjoyed a special multicultural morning tea at the centre. I was taken under instruction by the early childhood teacher there and had well explained to me how play based learning is such a vital way of communicating to these young students. The centre, which has a culturally diverse staff, has looked after an average of 50 children a day from more than 40 different countries since it opened 17 years ago. It really is a snapshot of the world, with families from India, Mauritius, Tonga, United Arab Emirates, Sudan, Somalia, Jordan, Pakistan and China currently using the centre.

A number of children and their families had dramatic experiences leaving their former countries and have needed some additional support from the centre's staff. The Logan TAFE Community Child Care Centre opened in 1992 to provide high-quality child care for children of TAFE students in a learning environment to support the practical needs of early childhood students. The centre has served as an inspirational training facility not only for the TAFE's child-care students but also for Griffith University, the Logan Hospital and multicultural organisations.

I was very impressed to meet staff member Suree Thatukarn at the morning tea. Suree began volunteering at the centre in July 1996 to improve her English—this is a great story—and she has since gone on to gain child-care qualifications and become a highly respected group leader at the centre. A number of the centre staff are studying to extend their qualifications as a result of the tuition fee waiver for child-care courses. This has seen 453 extra students enrolled in Logan TAFE.

The Bligh government is committed to providing all Queensland children with access to high-quality early education before they start school. To achieve this result, we are going to need a skilled and diverse workforce of qualified childcare workers and teachers, like the staff from the Logan TAFE Community Child Care Centre. We need a lot more of the Surees of this world, and I am sure there are many out there who will look forward to obtaining formalised qualifications so they can be better recognised within the early childhood education sector.

CHAIR: That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Education and Training. Thank you, Minister, and officers for your attendance. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the Queensland parliament website in approximately two hours. The committee will adjourn for lunch and resume at 1.45 pm. From that time, the committee will examine the proposed expenditure for organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport.

Mr WILSON: Chair, may I make a closing remark by way of a thankyou to all the members of the committee. Thank you for your interest and consideration of the portfolio statement for my department. I also extend a thankyou to the many, many, many unnamed public servants for their hard work over long hours in their contributions to the briefing that I have received over many months and the information provided to the committee in response to your questions. They are really the unsung heroes of this process.

I particularly thank my director-general and the executive management group for their steady hand in managing this very complex and detailed process. Finally, I formally acknowledge and say thank you to my ministerial staff who have also been burning the midnight oil, along with many of the public servants in my department who have helped us present to the committee today. Thank you very much for your time.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Proceedings suspended from 12.47 pm to 1.45 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—CHILD SAFETY AND SPORT**In Attendance**

Hon. PG Reeves, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport

Mr S Bevis, Policy Advisor

Mr S Gay, Senior Policy Advisor

Department of Communities

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Mr I Fulton, Chief Financial Officer

Mr J Marsh, Director, Finance, Corporate and Executive Services

Mr C Matheson, Executive Director, Sport and Recreation

CHAIR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The hearings of Estimates Committee G have now resumed. On behalf of the committee, I welcome to the hearing the minister, departmental officers, officers of statutory bodies and members of the public. My name is Steve Wettenhall MP, member for Barron River and chair of the committee. Mrs Liz Cunningham MP, the member for Gladstone, is the deputy chair. The other committee members are Mr Jack Dempsey MP, member for Bundaberg; Dr Bruce Flegg MP, member for Moggill; Mr Mark Ryan MP, member for Morayfield; Mrs Desley Scott MP, member for Woodridge; and Mr Murray Watt MP, member for Everton.

The committee is examining the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2009 for the areas set out in the order of appointment dated 3 June 2009. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport, beginning with Child Safety. This afternoon the committee will suspend proceedings for afternoon tea from 4.15 pm to 4.30 pm.

The committee's proceedings are lawful proceedings and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the Queensland parliament. Members of the public are welcome to observe the proceedings but may not participate otherwise. All present are asked to turn mobile phones off or into silent mode. In accordance with standing order 206, any person admitted to this hearing may be excluded at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee.

The committee has resolved that audio and video recording of these proceedings by Parliamentary Service cameras and microphones shall be broadcast via the Parliamentary Service website and to receivers throughout the parliamentary precinct. Television film coverage and photography will be allowed during the chair's opening statements and the introductory statements of the minister as well as for a short period during each changeover of ministerial advisers.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that under standing orders the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each time limit. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The standing orders require that at least half the time available for questions at today's hearing be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. Government members and non-government members will take turns asking questions, generally in blocks lasting 20 minutes, commencing with non-government members. The committee has resolved that non-committee members may be given leave to attend to ask questions during the hearing today. To assist Hansard, officers are asked to provide their names and positions prior to responding to a question referred by the minister.

I declare open for examination the proposed expenditure for organisational units within the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. The question before the committee is—
That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, under standing order 177, you are able to make an opening statement of no longer than five minutes.

Mr REEVES: The Bligh government is looking ahead to create brighter futures for more children and families this year. Child safety officers are at the front line of delivering on that. There is no doubting that child safety officers do a very difficult job in difficult circumstances. Child Safety Services exists

because of the frightening and harsh reality that some family members inflict harm on their children. But the system is working and is evolving. Unfortunately, child safety officers cannot be in every room of every house in Queensland every hour of the day. The Bligh government is doing everything it can to fight child abuse and neglect.

Our record \$638 million Child Safety Services budget in 2009-10 is more than triple the operating budget of six years ago. We have delivered on the commitments we made in last year's budget. This includes appointing more Child Safety front-line staff and improving the living options for children in care. We could not do this without the help of the dedicated foster and kinship carers across the state who are the backbone of the child protection system. I am pleased to announce today that, in a little over a year, 841 Queenslanders have been prepared to open their hearts and homes for children in need. This is thanks in part to the successful foster carer recruitment campaign which aimed to recruit 500 foster carers. I thank every single one of these Queenslanders who have volunteered to become a foster or kinship carer. We will continue to build on these foundations.

I am also pleased to inform the committee that at lunch today the Minister for Education and Training and I committed an extra \$50,000 this financial year from each portfolio to the Pyjama Foundation. This brings government funding to the Pyjama Foundation to more than \$210,000 for 2009-10. The money will go to help the Pyjama Foundation recruit, train and support community volunteers who read to children in care. It is a fantastic initiative that helps children in care improve their literacy levels, inspires a love of learning and instills self-belief in children.

In this budget, we are more committed than ever to keeping families together wherever possible. That is why Child Safety Services will spend more than \$16 million this year on family intervention services to help 1,700 Queensland families keep their children safely at home or have their children return home. However, we recognise that not all families can be safely reunited, despite our best efforts. More than half of this year's budget—\$332.3 million—is being invested with our community and government partners to provide approximately 7,500 children and young people with safe places to live.

This year's record budget represents a new road ahead. This is backed up by major public sector reforms that have seen the new Department of Communities delivering the full scope of human services. In a practical sense, it means there is 'no wrong door' for young people and families coming to any arm of the Department of Communities—whether their needs are housing, child protection or otherwise human service related.

As minister for both Sport and Child Safety, enhancing the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders is obviously one of my key priorities. The Bligh government is committed to making Queenslanders Australia's healthiest people, with a Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland goal to reduce obesity rates by one-third by 2020. We are doing this by helping Queensland communities get active through sport and recreation.

This year's budget will inject more than \$142 million into sport and recreation services and programs for Queensland communities, bringing thousands of job opportunities and strong economic benefits for the state. We are delivering a key election commitment with \$60 million over three years provided to support the redevelopment of the Gold Coast stadium at Carrara. This will generate more than 350 jobs during construction and contribute \$340 million to the economy over the next 10 years. We will also continue to support the government's Find Your 30 campaign.

From the local sporting club right through to supporting elite athletes, this is a budget that will maintain Queensland's position as a leader in sport and recreation. It puts us well on the way to becoming Australia's healthiest people. I have a number of challenges in front of me with both portfolios. We have done some good work but there is still a lot to do and I am committed to seeing that through.

CHAIR: The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Bundaberg.

Mr DEMPSEY: With reference to Service Delivery Statements and particularly 3-21 relating to the substantiations, can the minister please explain why Indigenous children are twice as likely to be victims of child sex abuse as other Queensland children and advise how many Indigenous children coming into care in 2008-09 were identified as having a sexually transmitted infection?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. As you know, the role of Child Safety expands every year and this year will be no different with more than 81,000 intakes expected. The area of Indigenous issues is a particular passion of mine, and I made a commitment to work with recognised entities and our peak body, the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak, to improve the outcomes for our Indigenous children in care. The Bligh government is acutely aware that Indigenous children are overrepresented in the child protection system. As at 31 March 2009, some 33 per cent of all children subject to child protection orders were identified as Indigenous.

Child Safety Services provides a range of practical support and services to Indigenous families to keep their children safe and out of statutory care. Key initiatives include: significant capital and recurrent funding for Indigenous community residential facilities, known as safe houses; family intervention

services specifically designed for Indigenous families and their children; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles which require Indigenous children and young people to be cared for within their own families and communities wherever possible; and additional carers, including the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foster carers, who will assist in making the best possible placement for children and young people. This will improve compliance with Indigenous child placement principles.

Since late 2007, the Bligh government as a member of the Council of Australian Governments committed to addressing the national targets to close the gaps on Indigenous disadvantage. It is widely understood that the level of disadvantage experienced by Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is unacceptable. That is why I and the other ministers for community services are working closely to tackle this overrepresentation of Indigenous families.

Mr DEMPSEY: How many have diseases?

CHAIR: Could the member please repeat the question.

Mr DEMPSEY: I was just emphasising that question. The question was: how many had infections?

Mr REEVES: Could you ask the question again.

Mr DEMPSEY: Part of my question was whether you could advise how many Indigenous children coming into care in 2008-09 were identified as having a sexually transmitted infection.

Mr REEVES: I think the honourable member would understand that it would be nearly impossible to find out what actual illnesses, diseases or infections each particular child or young person who Child Safety deals with had, but I will check for you. Also, that is obviously a health department question. You are actually asking Child Safety Services to come here and have that information on each individual. We are talking about 7,500 young people in out-of-home care, let alone others under a protective order. What you are wanting is how many of those have a particular disease.

Mr DEMPSEY: An infectious disease.

Mr REEVES: I will check regarding that and get back to you, but I am pretty sure that will be very hard to source.

Mr DEMPSEY: In response to government question on notice No. 5, you state that the ICMS system's reporting capabilities are prioritised towards enabling Child Safety Services to meet its current reporting obligation. Minister, why isn't reporting alleged criminal offences to police a priority when it is a clear legislative requirement under section 14(2) of the Child Protection Act, which states—

If the chief executive reasonably believes alleged harm may have involved the commission of a criminal offence relating to the child, the chief executive must immediately give details of the alleged harm to the police commissioner.

Mr REEVES: That is right. They do.

Mr DEMPSEY: So you are complying with the act?

Mr REEVES: What you read is what Child Safety do.

Mr DEMPSEY: And you are complying with it at all times?

Mr REEVES: Child safety officers go by the Child Protection Act and Child Safety Services act appropriately, as that act states.

Mr DEMPSEY: Thank you. In response to government question on notice No. 8, the minister—as he did in his opening statement—excused the record number of deaths of children known to the department as a result of better reporting, the definition of 'knowledge of a child' and that most children who die have pre-existing medical issues or the death is an accident. Minister, when will your government give a commitment to reducing this number rather than continue to make excuses for the increase?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I should have thanked the honourable member for his first question, because it is the first time I have actually been asked a question by the opposition since I became Minister for Child Safety.

Mr DEMPSEY: On the soap box already.

Mr REEVES: This is no laughing matter, because the death of any child is a tragedy.

Mr DEMPSEY: Sixty-three.

CHAIR: Order.

Mr REEVES: But sadly it is a reality that does and will continue to happen in Queensland. As I said, the death of a child is a tragedy. A child death review occurs after the death of any child who has been known to the department in the preceding three years. Some of those children in fact become known to the department as a result of the action that actually kills them. If they go to hospital as a result of harm that has been inflicted and as a result of that they tragically die then that is reported. As I said, a review of a child death occurs when Child Safety Services has received information about a child in the preceding three years. The majority of deaths of children known to child protection were due to pre-existing medical issues or accidents.

Child Safety Services advises me—I can give you more up-to-date figures than you were quoting—that between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2009 there were 516 child deaths in Queensland. This is a preliminary figure, but it is believed that there have been 516 child deaths in Queensland. Of that figure, 79 were known to the department. Of these 79, disease and morbid conditions accounted for 26 deaths. Twenty were accidental deaths including road fatalities, drowning and house fires. One death was a fatal assault. In this case the mother's partner is allegedly responsible. Ten deaths were suicides. In seven cases there was no involvement of Child Safety Services at the time of the death, as I mentioned before. In one case the child was in care. Of the two remaining children, one was subject to a child protection order granting a supervision order while the other was subject to support services. Sudden infant death syndrome accounted for four of the deaths, and the cause of death of 18 of the young people is yet to be confirmed.

As I said, 516 children died in that year and 79 were known to the department. So one in seven children who die is known to the department. While the figure is alarming—as in all deaths, 516—it is actually, in comparison, about the number of children that are known to the department. Child Safety Services cannot be in every room of every house at every hour of the day.

Mr DEMPSEY: I refer to non-government questions on notice Nos 4 and 6. Your government underspent across most corporate areas within the central office by a total of \$5 million yet increased this year's budget for central office by \$9 million. Minister, can you explain why you have cut the budget of 12—it is listed here if you need it tabled—front-line child safety service centres whilst increasing the budget of your already bloated bureaucracy in central office?

Mr REEVES: The question is incorrect. We did not cut 12 child safety service centres.

Mr DEMPSEY: No, you have cut the budget of 12 front-line child safety service centres. You have reduced the amount.

Mr REEVES: Final allocations will be subject to the number of children who come into care over the year and their unique needs. There has been no cut in the front-line staff. In fact, as I said before, we have actually increased the budget to a record \$638 million and provided a capital budget of \$32.6 million. In the last financial year we had extra staff put on because of the foster care recruitment campaign. I spoke about the success of 841 new foster carers since May 2008. In reality, the premise of your question is incorrect: there has been no cutback on front-line staff.

Mr DEMPSEY: I refer to the budget figures supplied in the Service Delivery Statement. One example is Cape/Torres, which has gone from \$8,614,573 down to \$7,608,664. That is one of 12 amounts that have been reduced while central office has increased. Do you agree that direct front-line services have been affected, Minister?

Mr REEVES: No, because the budget item you are talking about is not just about staff. The budget item is—

Mr DEMPSEY: I didn't mention staff.

Mr REEVES: Well, you mentioned less front-line staff, and that is incorrect. The budget item you are talking about is the total budget for that office. It has no relation to the total number of staff. I should add that a number of zonal offices now have the placement unit within them. I have visited six of the seven zonal offices and I think the majority of them had the placement units. Obviously the placement units are the people who on a Friday afternoon, or any time of the week, are trying to find placements for our most vulnerable children. It was a direct decision and policy by Child Safety Services to put that in the zonal office. It has been shown to have worked effectively. As a result of that, some of the staff who were in the particular child safety service centres are now based in the zonal offices.

Mr DEMPSEY: Just as a matter of clarification, Mr Chairman, I actually said 'front-line services', not 'front-line staff'.

CHAIR: Ask the next question, member for Bundaberg. If the next question includes a component for clarification, that can be the case.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, will you be cutting front-line services at those centres, as originally asked?

Mr REEVES: No.

Mr DEMPSEY: Thank you. Previous ministers have promised that data on case planning will be made available. With the \$50 million spent on your government's world-class ICMS system, can you now provide details of how many children on protection orders and how many children in out-of-home care do not have current case plans? How many case plans have not been reviewed for more than six months as part of your department's requirements?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The integrated client management system is the system that everyone thinks is an excellent tool, except for the opposition. ICMS is a state-wide web based information system which provides a central source of data for all Queensland's child protection matters and is accessible by over 2,000 staff at 61 child safety service delivery points across

the state. Every day in child safety service centres across the state, front-line child protection workers are using ICMS to help them make well-informed decisions about children. ICMS provides a state-wide view of all case management details of any child or a family member who has contact with Child Safety. ICMS allows for the recording of all intake details, investigation and assessment details, court applications and resulting orders and information on any ongoing intervention which occurs, as well as carer and care service details.

If the member went out and visited some of these child safety service centres he could talk to the child safety service centre staff who have been there for five or 10 years and they would tell him about the benefits of ICMS compared to the bad old days of the system. It is a tool that covers the whole state and helps them find the history of a child and their family with one hit of a button of the computer.

I think part of your question related to a question on notice you asked previously in parliament and about which you made some media statements. If I were to ask each staff member at each child safety service centre to go through and answer your question then we could get that data, but at the moment we are testing ICMS. Data to give a report will be available, but I was not prepared—and I know that the DG was not prepared—to ask individual staff to go through each case while they should be focusing on ensuring our children and young people are protected.

Mr DEMPSEY: As previously asked in the last question, how many case plans have not been reviewed for more than six months?

Mr REEVES: I will take that on notice and I will get back to you.

Mr DEMPSEY: Do you agree that that would be a basic part of ICMS, bearing in mind that that is a legislative requirement under the act? It states at section 51V(3)—

In any case, the review must happen at least every 6 months.

It is part of the act that it is incumbent on the government to follow.

Mr REEVES: What I am saying to you is that very shortly ICMS will be able to give that data at the push of a button, but I am not prepared to ask Child Safety Services staff to waste time on your question when their No. 1 role is to analyse and make decisions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and young people. I can also assure you that all children subject to finalised child protection orders have a case plan developed. The reality is that the Children's Court cannot grant a final child protection order unless a case plan has been developed for a child.

Mr DEMPSEY: Wasn't this promised more than two years ago?

Mr REEVES: What I will say to you is that at the moment the ICMS is in a testing mode to be able to deliver what you want at the push of a button. Once again, I remind you what I said in the last two answers. Child Safety Services staff are working on each particular case and focusing on the wellbeing and safety of our children. I do not think their time should be taken up by a question on notice that you decide might be a good idea at the time.

Mr DEMPSEY: So is your department meeting legislative requirements in relation to section 51V(3), as I have asked previously?

Mr REEVES: As I just said to you, I can assure you that all children subject to a finalised child protection order have a case plan developed.

Mr DEMPSEY: And is it being reviewed in accordance with the legislative requirement?

Mr REEVES: I can assure you that all children subject to a finalised child protection order have a case plan developed. The Children's Court would not allow a final child protection order to be made if we did not present the case plan.

Mr DEMPSEY: But how can you say that if you do not know?

Mr REEVES: Because the Children's Court cannot grant a final child protection order unless a case plan has been developed.

Mr DEMPSEY: And they are being reviewed every six months?

Mr REEVES: The Children's Court, as I said, cannot grant a final child protection order unless a case plan has been developed.

Mr DEMPSEY: It is simple. Are they complying with the act?

Mr REEVES: I will get back to you regarding the information about every six months.

Mr DEMPSEY: Because it is a legislative requirement.

Mr REEVES: I understand that.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, a report released today by the Australian Institute of Criminology found that adolescents are responsible for between 40 and 90 per cent of all child sexual abuse matters. How many intakes have involved child sex abuse allegations where the perpetrator was a sibling? How many of these matters did the department take protection orders out for? Is this another issue that the government does not think is a priority to be reporting on?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question.

Mr DEMPSEY: I will table that report.

Mr REEVES: I think we may be able to get that, but I am not too sure. I want to make one point. Suddenly the member for Bundaberg is coming out saying that we are obviously not taking enough children into care, yet nearly every second press release the member for Bundaberg issues says that we are taking too many children out of their families. I do not know what you think Child Safety should be doing. I could table those press releases if I wanted to in order to show—

Mr DEMPSEY: Please do.

Mr REEVES:—the snatch and grab terrible statements that the member for Bundaberg continues to make in his press releases. The reality is that Child Safety Services staff do a terrific job in difficult circumstances and they have the tools and framework in place to make the best decisions on the safety and wellbeing of children. Sexual abuse, as we all know, has shocking impacts on children. It includes disruption to social and cognitive function, poor interpersonal relationships, family breakdowns, behavioural problems, increased depression and other mental health issues. As I have previously said, Child Safety invests money to fund 10 non-government organisations for sexual abuse counselling services.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired.

Mr WATT: Minister, welcome to your first estimates committee as a minister. Minister, I note page 3-2 of the SDS refers to the creation of a new, all-inclusive Department of Communities including the former department of child safety. Can the minister please outline the benefits of this new arrangement for the delivery of child protection services in Queensland?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The creation of the new Department of Communities represents a new road ahead for looking after Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. To mark the completion of the former department of child safety and with leave of the committee, I wish to table the final report of the department of child safety.

Leave granted.

Mr REEVES: It is part of the major reform of the public sector that will see the new department deliver the full scope of human services. Agencies such as Child Safety, Housing, Communities, Sport and Recreation, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships have been incorporated into one department. This will maximise opportunities to link services and address any service gaps. In other words, it will mean there will be no wrong door for young people and families coming to the arm of the Department of Communities whether their needs are housing, child protection or other human services. It will also allow us to focus on providing consolidated early intervention and prevention services to reduce the potential for harm to children and young people. An integrated services approach also helps us to deliver the Bligh government's Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland vision for supporting safe and caring communities.

I am very excited about the opportunity to work in close conjunction with my fellow Department of Communities ministers to increase the scope of the consolidated response to the needs of Queensland's children and young people. But we are not resting on our laurels and we are committed to continue evolving and improving Queensland's child protection system. We are standing by our pre-election commitments of maintaining vital front-line child safety services as evidenced by our record \$638 million budget.

Over the past five years, Child Safety Services has implemented all of the recommendations from the Crime and Misconduct Commission inquiry which has led to significant child protection reforms. Since that inquiry, Child Safety has continued to make improvements for children and young people. As child safety minister, I can guarantee we will maintain our focus on child protection within the new Department of Communities and we will continue to improve child protection in Queensland.

The Child Safety Services stream within the Department of Communities maintains a child protection focus by using evidence based child protection practices and policies combined with commitment to accountability and transparency. This is embedded in all aspects of child protection work, particularly service delivery. The Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian will also continue to oversee and scrutinise the child protection system to ensure that child protection issues are identified and addressed by government. Reports prepared by the commission such as the child guardian report help inform Child Safety in policy development and practice. We welcome these reports. They help us to achieve continuous improvements in child safety service delivery.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I note on page 3-10 of the SDS that the relationship between government and service providers is highlighted as a critical element of effective service delivery. Can the minister highlight any innovative partnerships with the non-government sector that are supporting children in care?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question, because I know she has a passion for those children and young people in out-of-home care. The non-government community services sector is a critical partner in the delivery of child protection services. We simply cannot do our job

without them. While there is an important role for the department to undertake statutory investigations in case management clients, we could not even fulfil this role without the support of our non-government partners. Where it is necessary for children and young people to be placed outside their home because it is not safe for them to remain, it is the non-government sector that provides over 60 per cent of our out-of-home care places.

I am very happy to say that we have many fantastic non-government service providers who share with us the responsibility to give Queensland's abused and neglected children the best opportunities possible. One organisation I would mention which provides an innovative and valuable service is a group called the Pyjama Foundation. This group recruits, trains and supports volunteers who give up their time to read to kids in foster care and also to help them with their school work. Their volunteers are known as pyjama angels and they do a terrific job. Many of them also help out as respite carers and might take foster kids out for the weekend so that the carers can get a break and the kids gain new experiences.

I am advised that there are currently about 700 active volunteer pyjama angels. Over the past 12 months the program has recruited and trained 414 volunteers and there are another 200 applicants waiting to be trained. Over 900 foster children have been referred to the program for help with reading, literacy and homework support. Right now over 700 kids per week are receiving this valuable service. The support provided by the Pyjama Foundation to children in care is highly valued by the extremely positive feedback being received from the foster carers, teachers and child safety officers.

The Bligh government and Child Safety Services are committed to meeting the Toward Q2 commitment of increasing the number of volunteers by 50 per cent. I am proud to say that Child Safety Services, along with the department of education, has been providing funding assistance for the Pyjama Foundation since 2005. Currently, the foundation receives annual funding of \$110,000. Today I announce that I have just approved an additional \$50,000 from Child Safety and \$50,000 from Education. This will be paid to them very soon to help them with the training of new volunteers and program costs. This is another fine example of the Bligh government delivering on its election commitment to maintain funding to vital front-line services.

I want to make special mention of the founder of the Pyjama Foundation, Bronwyn Sheehan. Bronwyn is a tireless, enthusiastic and committed person. Bronwyn's commitment to literacy and development in children in state care has been formally recognised across the nation in a variety of ways. More recently Bronwyn received Queensland's Australian of the Year 2009 and she was a subsequent finalist in the Australian of the Year award in Canberra in January 2009.

Mr RYAN: Good afternoon, Minister. Minister, I refer to the 2009-10 output statement on page 3-18 of the SDS and note the record investment that Child Safety Services is making in child protection in 2009-10. Can the minister outline the historical significance of this year's budget?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is looking ahead to create brighter futures for more children and families. Our record \$638 million Child Safety Services budget in 2009-10 is more than triple the operating budget from six years ago of \$182 million. We have delivered on promises we made in last year's budget, including appointing more Child Safety staff and improving the living options for children in care. In that time staffing levels have doubled from 1,217 full-time equivalent staff in the 2003-04 year to the current budgeted level of 2,428. We have delivered on an extensive capital works program and recruited our target of 500 new foster and kinship carers, as I previously said—841. We will continue to build on these foundations.

The Bligh government will continue our four-year, \$15.1 million initiative to improve career opportunities for our front-line Child Safety staff. In this budget we are also more committed than ever to keeping families together wherever possible. That is why Child Safety Services will spend approximately \$16 million this year on family intervention services to help 1,700 Queensland families to keep their children safely at home or have their children return home. This is an extra \$2 million boost to family intervention services since last year. However, we recognise that not all families can be safely reunited despite our best efforts.

In the last five years we have significantly increased funding to our child protection partners. Since 2004-05 we have increased funding to these organisations by almost \$209 million, to \$332 million this year. This is an increase of 2.7 times in these five years alone. This investment in our community and government departments will allow them to deliver child protection services needed by Queensland's children and young people and their families.

More than \$80 million goes directly to 3,800 foster and kinship carers and more than \$101 million over four years will fund a wide range of safe places for children with complex and extreme needs. We have also allocated more than \$32 million in the 2009-10 budget to the capital program including \$8 million for a range of houses for abused and neglected children. These projects, which will need planning, design and construction, will also mean more jobs for Queenslanders.

In the remote Indigenous area we are spending \$9.9 million on establishing and operating 11 safe houses to provide emergency accommodation in the short term. We are also investing \$2.3 million over three years on a coaching trial to build positive futures for Indigenous young people in South-West Queensland.

Despite the current economic climate, the Bligh government is committed to continuing to deliver vital front-line services because the bottom line is that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people is our No. 1 priority. I know that the member for Morayfield has a family member who works for Child Safety Services. I know that he knows of the great work that the Child Safety Services staff do.

CHAIR: Minister, I refer to page 3-9 of the SDS and note that Child Safety Services continued to respond to growing demands for child protection services throughout 2008-09. Can the minister detail the growth experienced and what plans Child Safety Services has to address that growth in 2009-10?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The safety and wellbeing of children and young people, as I have said before, is our No. 1 priority. Because of the number of intakes received, Child Safety Services has recorded information about approximately one in seven children in Queensland. From 2003-04 to 2007-08 the number of intakes recorded by the department increased by 61.1 per cent. The department has found that a significant proportion of parents believed responsible for substantiated harm or at risk of harm to their children were struggling with alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence, mental illness, criminal history or were abused themselves as children. In nearly half the cases more than one of these risk factors are present.

To address this, the Department of Communities has put into place initiatives to address the escalation in demand. Child Safety Services currently funds family intervention services to provide practical common-sense assistance to families in the child protection system. Child Safety also puts them in touch with other services they need to address their problems, for example, domestic violence, drug and alcohol rehabilitation services and mental health services. Today there are 35 family intervention services providing support to families right across Queensland. The government also provides referral for active intervention services. These services work with the consent of parents to provide intensive family support to families with children aged from zero to 10 years.

Incorporating community agencies into one new Department of Communities has numerous benefits for the delivery of Child Safety, Housing, Communities, Sport and Recreation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships services. Having one department allows us to maximise the opportunities to link services, address service gaps and to better support the needs of these parents, which in turn reduces the potential for harm of children and young people in Queensland.

The new Department of Communities enables me to work closely with my colleague the minister for community services to continue refining programs and responses so we can offer support to families before their problems escalate. We are keen to look at the next stage of reforms to the child protection system so families can be referred to the support services they need when they need them. This will help us to meet our commitments under the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, which aims to reduce child abuse and neglect in Australia. About six weeks after my appointment as Minister for Child Safety, the Council of Australian Governments endorsed this framework. We are currently working on our implementation plan to meet Queensland's commitment under it.

The Bligh government is committed to continue the delivery of vital front-line services such as child safety. Child Safety Services is also working with Disability Services to assist families to maintain the care of their children with very complex needs within their family home.

Mr WATT: I note on page 3-22 of the SDS that the ratio of children and young people in home based care to the number of carer families was less than expected in 2008-09 and it is anticipated to reduce further in 2009-10. Minister, can you advise the committee how the foster carer recruitment campaign has contributed to this outcome?

Mr REEVES: I thank the member for Everton for the question. I would love to tell the committee about this. We know that the best place for a child is with their family but only if it is safe. However, we recognise that not all children can be safely reunited with the families. Child Safety Services relies heavily on the dedicated kinship and foster carers throughout Queensland. They are the backbone of our child protection system.

I am delighted to advise that the government's drive to attract more carers—the Foster And Kinship Carer Recruitment Campaign—has been a runaway success. It has made a significant contribution to reducing the ratio of children and young people in home based care to the number of carer families. Since the campaign started on 12 May last year—I think it was Mother's Day last year—Child Safety Services has recruited 841 new foster and kinship carers.

To have 841 Queenslanders in a little over a year open their hearts and homes to children in need is a fantastic response. It is a remarkable effort from the dedicated staff of both Child Safety Services and their funded foster and kinship carer agency partners. They have managed the training and assessment process that has led to the approval of an impressive number of new Queensland carers.

This larger pool of carers will make a significant contribution to improving our capacity to match children with carers who can meet their individual needs. It should also help reduce the number of placements for each child. Importantly, it will help us address the expected growth in the medium term of children expected to enter care due to Queensland's growing population. The good news for many carers is that there will be a much larger pool of respite carers.

Our campaign is one of Australia's most successful foster carer recruitment campaigns. I am proud to hear that the success of our campaign has attracted the attention of my interstate colleagues. To date the governments of Western Australia, New South Wales, Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory have sought copies of the television advertising and details of the process implemented by Child Safety Services to enhance the recruitment and retention of carers.

In fact, our campaign Real Carers Really Needed was recently launched in Tasmania. Images of Queensland children were substituted for images of Tasmanian children in the campaign's television advertising and promotional materials. More importantly, our campaign has increased the awareness of the need for carers throughout Queensland and has been successful in attracting carers from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences.

This will further contribute to more stable care and support for children in care. This is important of course because the health and wellbeing of our young children is our No. 1 priority. I congratulate those 841 carers and encourage others to follow their lead. These people are great Queenslanders and they are looking out for our most vulnerable children and young people.

Mrs SCOTT: With reference to page 3-3 of the SDS I note the department is committed to the targets as outlined in *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland*. Can you please outline the key contributions Child Safety Services is making to these targets?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. In September 2008 the Premier launched *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland*. *Toward Q2* outlines an ambitious vision for the future of Queensland. It sets equally ambiguous targets to be achieved by 2020.

The vision for Queenslanders includes creating a diverse economy powered by bright ideas, protecting our lifestyle and environment and delivering world-class education and training. It also aims for Queenslanders to be Australia's healthiest people and supports safe and caring communities. This is where Child Safety Services makes its greatest contribution.

The work of the Department of Communities, in particular, contributes to the Q2 vision of safe and caring communities by providing or funding services that make a real difference to the lives of families and children in Queensland. The Bligh government and Child Safety Services is also committed to meeting the *Toward Q2* commitment of increasing the number of volunteers by 50 per cent by 2020. Child Safety Services plays a key role in trying to achieve that target and has made significant progress by expanding the pool of foster carers in Queensland.

Since the Foster and Kinship Carer Recruitment Campaign was launched in May 2008, as you have heard, 841 carers have been recruited. As I said, this campaign has been a roaring success. The implementation of child health assessments and health plans for children in outer home care as part of the child health passport will contribute to a healthy Queensland.

Additionally, Child Safety Services is contributing to a target of halving the proportion of Queenslanders living in households without a working parent by providing \$300,000 over three years to participate in the prosperity initiative. This initiative in the Logan-Goodna corridor will assist up to 90 young people a year transition from care to engage in education and training and participate in the workforce.

In 2009 we will also commence work on an initiative for the support of young people leaving state care. This initiative will support young people to access secure and stable housing and access education, training and employment opportunities. I am keen to see Child Safety Services clients access the benefits under Q2 as we strive for a bright and prosperous future for all Queenslanders.

Mr RYAN: With reference to page 3-4 of the SDS I note the establishment of a new Indigenous youth mentoring service in south-west Queensland. Minister, please explain how this service will operate? What are the expected benefits to children?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is naturally concerned about the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders in the child protection system as I said before in answering a question from the member for Bundaberg. However, it is something that we are working hard to address.

The Indigenous family and youth coaching mentoring service is a new initiative which aims to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous young people in the child protection system as well as in the youth justice system. It also aims to address the underrepresentation in education and employment. As part of the government's record funding of \$638 million in the 2009-10 state budget we are providing \$490,000 to fund this service this year. We are standing by this commitment which will be delivered by non-government agencies and will focus significantly on the Darling Downs in south-west Queensland.

We chose this region because the rate of Indigenous youth on dual child protection and youth justice orders is high and school attendance is low. Many centres in this part of the state are also still enjoying the benefits of mining exploration and development which provides new job opportunities for Indigenous youth under the program.

The coaching and mentoring service will accept referrals from the various arms of the Department of Communities as well as police, non-government organisations, hospitals, social workers and child and youth mental health services. The service will support young people in a range of ways, including teaching them parenting and conflict management skills and providing them with positive role models and support to improve their cultural connections.

The young people will also be engaged in education, employment and training opportunities. As a result, we expect there will be an improvement in community safety and the young people will be better skilled and educated and will be in fulfilling jobs. We expect this service to work with up to 80 young people and their families each year. This initiative is a practical example of the way in which various arms of the new Department of Communities can work collaboratively to help deliver positive outcomes for all. It is a very practical example of the fact that there will be no wrong door for young people and their families coming to any arm of the Department of Communities.

As I said previously, I will work closely with my ministerial colleague the Minister for Community Services and Housing because the initiative is aimed at benefiting clients from her portfolio as well as mine. We are planning for this initiative to start early next year after we have selected a non-government service provider. This is an exciting initiative aimed at giving vulnerable young people a better chance at life. It will provide them with education and employment opportunities and help them out of the statutory child protection and youth justice systems. I am convinced the more we can engage our at-risk young people in education and employment opportunities the less likely we are to see them entering the formal statutory systems.

I am certainly expecting to see some long-term benefits arise from this initiative such as a reduction in child protection and youth justice numbers in this part of the state. Once we can demonstrate this initiative has given us good results I will be advocating for the expansion of this initiative to other parts of Queensland.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Bundaberg.

Mr DEMPSEY: You claim to have recruited 841 new carers. Can you tell the committee how many foster carers actually ceased caring roles in the same period as outlined in the government question on notice?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Once again we have a question that knocks a great outcome for Child Safety Services. But before doing so I will answer some previous questions that the member asked.

Mr DEMPSEY: Point of order, Mr Chairman.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr DEMPSEY: The minister is misleading the committee. He is saying words that I have not actually said.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. Please continue, Minister.

Mr REEVES: With regard to the question on sexually transmitted diseases, Queensland Health is responsible for the treatment, recording and reporting on sexual transmitted diseases. Medical records, as you would understand from your past life, are confidential and come under the Privacy Act.

With regard to the details about the precise nature of sexual abuse, I point out that that is incorporated in individual case notes. Collection of this level of detail would, as I have said previously, take officers away from the front line. The most important thing about ICMS is that that information is recorded on ICMS. Anyone who needs to deal with a particular issue or family has all the data in front of them and can make a proper decision. I think you would finally agree that it is better that the people who need this information have it at their disposal rather than spend days and weeks collecting this information for sometimes inane questions.

I turn to the number of carers entering the system. Corporate state-wide data is not currently available on the distinct number of carer entries and exits. However, corporate state-wide data is available on the total number approved. By tracking trends for some time it can be seen whether more carers are entering the system than exiting the system. The data provides an indication of carer entries.

From 30 June 2008 to 30 March 2009 the number of approved carers grew by 9.3 per cent. That is an overall number of 4,050 carer families. The reality is that that number will be higher when the figure for the last part of the recruitment campaign is added.

Mr DEMPSEY: Is it 841?

Mr REEVES: It will not be a total of 841 because some of them would have been part of the 4,050. As I mentioned in response to the question on notice No. 3 the total number of pre carer families in 2006-07 increased by 132. During 2007-08 it was 478. The recruitment campaign will put 841 on to that.

Mr DEMPSEY: Considering almost every youth and adult in Queensland uses a mobile phone, will the minister please explain why the 1800 report child abuse hotline number does not work from a mobile phone? How do you expect children or anyone who does not have access to a landline phone to report abuse? I would be very surprised if there was one person in this room who does not have a mobile phone. If you want to test it then press that number.

Mr REEVES: Is that your stunt for the day?

Mr DEMPSEY: It is not a joke when we are talking about abused children not being able to report abuse.

Mr REEVES: I do not believe it is a joke.

Mr DEMPSEY: Please do not take it as a joke.

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I will get back to you. I am not sure of the details, as you would understand. I will get back to you.

Mr DEMPSEY: Will the minister detail how many staff currently handling active case files have not received induction training? How many of the 200-plus temporary staff currently employed have not received induction training?

Mr REEVES: I will get that information for you. This gives me an opportunity to congratulate the staff for the great work that they do in that regard. Child safety work, as I have said on numerous occasions, is very stressful and often traumatic. The harming of children is confronting. Staff deal with this on a daily basis. You can imagine some of the people that that staff have to deal with. They are some of the most horrendous people in society.

We are talking about people who inflict harm on children and young people, so you can imagine the great work that our officers do. The department is committed to providing ongoing training to our staff to ensure that high-quality services are provided to our clients. The department requires all new child safety officers to undergo mandatory training as soon as possible after commencing duties. A total of 393 child safety officers joined the department during 2008-09. Of these, 295 staff undertook child safety officer entry-level training. Of the remaining staff, 70 were granted exemptions or are in the process of gaining exemptions due to prior learning or previous experience. A further 28 officers ceased employment before the training program commenced. Some 87 per cent of officers who commenced the child safety officer training program did so within three months of taking up duty. Child safety officers are placed on restricted duties from the commencement of employment until the completion of phase 2 training—a minimum of seven weeks. Prior to the completion of phase 2, they do not independently exercise any statutory declarations as outlined in the Child Protection Act 1999.

When I visited Cairns—the chairman's part of the world—I had the pleasure to drop in on a training session that was occurring. I informed a person who had just started the day before that it was only natural that the minister pays them a visit on the second day of their job. I was very impressed with the improved training that was occurring and impressed with the great number of new people who are putting up their hands wanting to join Child Safety. We have also opened up the qualifications and the like for recruits to Child Safety Services which I will explore later on.

Mr DEMPSEY: Just to clarify that, Minister: are you actually saying that you are giving cases to untrained staff?

Mr REEVES: I am sorry. You might not have understood it, but I will say it again. A total of 393 child safety officers joined the department during 2008-09. Of these, 295 staff undertook child safety officer entry-level training. Of the remaining staff, 70 were granted exemptions or are in the process of gaining exemptions due to prior learning or previous experience—that is, they could have been a police officer, a teacher or a range of things. A further 28 officers ceased employment before the training program commenced. Some 87 per cent of officers who commenced the child safety officer training program did so within three months of taking up their duty. Child safety officers are placed on restricted duties from the commencement of employment until the completion of phase 2—a minimum of seven weeks.

Mr DEMPSEY: So they are doing inductions.

CHAIR: Member for Bundaberg.

Mr DEMPSEY: Can the minister tell this committee, in terms of children known to the department during 2008-09 and considering that there may have been staff who had not done an induction, how many new staff may have dealt with a child who is now deceased?

Mr REEVES: I think I know what the member is getting at, but the reality is that Child Safety Services staff do not make decisions on their own. The structures within Child Safety Services mean that we have team leaders, we have senior staff and we have managers. All assist in the decision-making process of particular cases. I know where the member for Bundaberg is going and it is incorrect.

Mr DEMPSEY: A point of correction, Mr Chairman: he does not know where I am going. He has no idea in that I asked in relation to induction and training—

CHAIR: Member for Bundaberg, just ask the next question please.

Mr DEMPSEY: Thank you, Mr Chair. As previously asked, have they completed induction training?

Mr REEVES: As I have just read out twice now—I can read it again—all staff are trained. Child safety officers are placed on restricted duties from the commencement of their employment until the completion of the phase 2 training—a minimum of seven weeks. Restricted duties means what it says—that is, until they have finished the phase 2 training, they will not make decisions. Even if they have the training, member for Bundaberg, Child Safety Services staff do not make decisions in isolation. The decisions are made, like any good practice, in a team exercise.

Mr DEMPSEY: Okay. Considering that your government has spent \$50 million so far on a state-of-the-art computer system, can the minister provide details on how many parents committed suicide or died after a child was removed in 2008-09?

Mr REEVES: I usually thank the honourable member for the question. I will, but the inference of the question is that Child Safety Services' decisions resulted in parents taking their own lives.

Mr DEMPSEY: No.

Mr REEVES: I think that is absolutely appalling.

Mr DEMPSEY: No.

Mr REEVES: Absolutely appalling.

CHAIR: Member for Bundaberg!

Mr DEMPSEY: Mr Chairman, the minister is misleading—

CHAIR: Order! Member for Bundaberg, you have asked the question and the minister is entitled to answer it.

Mr DEMPSEY: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mr REEVES: I think it is absolutely appalling to say what you have just said. If I have heard correctly—and I am sure I have—

Mr DEMPSEY: I can repeat it.

Mr REEVES:—you gave the inference—

Mr DEMPSEY: No, I did not.

Mr REEVES:—that decisions that Child Safety Services made resulted in parents taking their own lives.

Mr DEMPSEY: No.

Mr REEVES: I think you have crossed over the line.

Mr DEMPSEY: Point of order, Mr Chairman: simply for clarification, I am asking about data.

CHAIR: There is no point of order. Minister, please continue.

Mr REEVES: I believe you crossed over the line there. The reality is that Child Safety Services staff, as I have previously said, deal with some of the most horrendous clients imaginable. These are people who inflict harm on children and young people. Those child safety officers make decisions based on the safety and wellbeing of those children and young people. Ultimately, that is their No. 1 priority. Any matters with regard to other family members are immaterial when they come to make the decision. Their No. 1 priority—and it should be their No. 1 focus—is based on the child and young person's wellbeing. If that child or young person is being harmed or neglected, that is their focus and that is the decision they make. But I think for you to actually insinuate what you did when you asked that question is appalling.

Mr DEMPSEY: Okay. Minister, considering reunification and kinship carers are an important part of child protection, how can you reunify families if by your own words now you cannot even tell me if parents are alive or dead from your data?

Mr REEVES: Sorry. If it is all right with the chair, can the member ask that question again so everyone can hear what you are saying?

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, considering reunification and kinship carers are an important part of the child protection policy—and, as you just alluded to, you do not have that data—how can you reunify families if you cannot even tell if the parents are dead or alive?

Mr REEVES: I did not say I did not have figures about reunification. Reunification occurs for children and young people—

Mr DEMPSEY: How can you give them back to the parent if they are dead?

CHAIR: Order! The member for Bundaberg will allow the minister to answer the question that he has asked free of what are becoming too many interruptions.

Mr REEVES: Obviously we are talking about a very serious subject. However, reunification occurs after a full assessment of the family situation. Obviously someone cannot reunify with their family if unfortunately their parent has passed away, so I do not quite understand the premise of the question. Child Safety Services do not and cannot reunify a child with a parent if the parent has unfortunately passed away. Also, case workers maintain contact with families in making informed reunification decisions and other decisions regarding the child, even if the child is in out-of-home care.

Mr DEMPSEY: So you do not have the data. Minister, according to your budget papers, you currently have 2,464 staff on your books, yet for 2009-10 you are only budgeting for 2,428—a reduction of 36 staff. Minister, where are these staff going, or are they being sacked?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. It might come as a surprise to the member for Bundaberg—

Mr DEMPSEY: It is in the book.

Mr REEVES: I have answered it before, but I will make it clear to him. The reality is that we had a number of temporary staff employed last year doing a number of things. One was to run and assist in the training and recruitment of the 841 new carers that we have had since May. Secondly, we have had extra staff looking at the investigations and assessments as well. Because the foster carer recruitment campaign was so successful, we will continue recruiting foster and kinship carers but obviously do not need the number of staff that we previously had. The 2008-09 budget provided for 2,419 full-time equivalents; this year it is 2,428.

But this gives me an opportunity to tell the committee of some research I did this morning. I went and had a look at the last budget for the National-Liberal Party government. I refer to the child protection budget—which was the May budget before it got defeated in the June election, and thankfully it did because that is why I am here—in 1998. What do you reckon it was? \$32 million! What is it today? \$638 million! What about Child Safety staff? 562! How many front-line staff? 301!

Mr DEMPSEY: How many passed away—

CHAIR: Order!

Mr REEVES: Fifty-three per cent. I think that says it all.

CHAIR: Member for Bundaberg.

Mr DEMPSEY: With an anticipated 81,600 intakes, 6,640 new orders for protection being sought and a record 7,630 children in state care in 2009-10, can the minister explain why this government is only recruiting an additional nine new staff across the whole department? Are those staff going to be in front-line services?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. We just had one question that said we were reducing staff; now this question says that there are additional staff. I do not know whether the member for Bundaberg knows, but obviously the people who are feeding him the questions are feeding him wrongly.

Mr DEMPSEY: How many full time and temporary?

CHAIR: Order!

Mr DEMPSEY: That is what you said.

Mr REEVES: The reality is that we have improved our retention for staff, even though obviously there is a way to go in that regard. Our retention rate was about 87.1 per cent last financial year which was up from 80 per cent the year before. Obviously with more experienced staff, the work can be done more effectively. Systems like the ICMS system that the member for Bundaberg continues to knock is always evolving and improving. That assists staff with making decisions. I am confident that we have better practices in training and better decision-making tools. For example, one of the difficulties is incentives to keep staff in rural and regional centres. We have developed incentive schemes to keep staff there as well as opening our qualifications career path.

I have been lucky enough to visit 22 of the 50 child safety service centres since I became the minister. In fact, I even went to the Bundaberg child safety service centre and I was really impressed after listening to staff. What really impresses me when I get the opportunity to present service

certificates is the number of five-year service certificates that I present and also the number of 10- and 20-year service certificates. By keeping those dedicated staff within Child Safety Services means that not only is their work output terrific but also their experience and their mentoring that they can pass on to the new recruits assists in decision making and enables those new staff to take on the extra work covered by them.

But when we talk about staff, one point I have not made is that we also should remember that \$330 million this year goes to the NGO and community partners sector. The NGO sector provides plenty of jobs but, more importantly, it provides a great service to our children and young people in Health and Child Safety Services, delivering the gate services that they are delivering.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. Minister, on page 3-3 of the SDS I notice that a strategic issue for the Department of Communities is to close the gap by working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. Can you explain the role that Child Safety Services is playing in achieving this national goal?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Child Safety Services is committed to working across all levels of government with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals to contribute to closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. I know that the chair, who asked the question, has a passion in that regard.

The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families who come into contact with the child protection system is a tragic symptom of economic and social disadvantage. Along with its partners, the Bligh government, through Child Safety, is working towards improving services so that Indigenous children can be supported and safe with their families and in their communities. Our goal is to, wherever possible, ensure that Indigenous children retain their connection to their culture.

To help this happen, the Bligh government has allocated \$45.6 million over four years for the establishment of 11 safe houses in Indigenous communities. That includes capital funding of \$16.5 million and operational funding of \$29.1 million. These safe houses will deliver supervised residential care services and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people to remain in their communities while their longer-term needs are assessed. These safe houses will be accompanied by family intervention services to provide support and assistance for Indigenous children, young people and families who are involved in the child protection system. They will also assist in addressing child protection concerns so that Indigenous children and young people can remain safely in or return to their family homes. The Bligh government will also continue to provide dedicated funding to the recognised entities—the independent Indigenous organisations—that actively participate in all significant decisions that are made regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the child protection system.

To improve service delivery and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and to support Indigenous workforce participation, Child Safety Services actively employ Indigenous staff at all levels of the organisation. Cross-cultural training for Child Safety Services staff is also provided through the foundation studies in culture and Indigenous engagement. I am personally committed to the Closing the Gap reform agenda so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are safe and well and are living happy, healthy and fulfilling lives.

In closing, I would just like to comment that the recognised entities do a terrific job. In fact, the recognised entity that I spent a bit of time with—Wuchopperen in Cairns—I think does an absolutely superb job. They are focused on looking after and assisting these children and young people and their families who need support.

Mr WATT: With reference to page 3-4 of the SDS and the continued support of the One Chance at Childhood initiative, can the minister provide the committee with any update on this initiative and its success in securing the long-term stability for children in care?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. We know that the best place for a child to be is with their families or parents, but only if it is safe. They must have a parent who is willing and able to care for them. Sadly, sometimes this is not always possible. It is never in a child's interest to drift back and forth between their carers and their parents. If parents cannot genuinely take care of their children, then the community expects Child Safety to act.

To ensure that we are doing all we can to avoid children drifting in and out of care, the Queensland government established the One Chance at Childhood program in March 2008. Seven early childhood program coordinators and 24 early childhood reunification and permanency planning officers were employed across the state. This program is designed to help child safety officers establish clear case planning goals that avoid situations where young children drift from foster care to their parents and back to foster care. The program makes it absolutely clear that if children cannot live at home safely, they will get their chance at a happy, stable and permanent home elsewhere. It

unashamedly puts the needs of children first so that babies and toddlers—in particular those under the age of four—have some stability in their young lives. We want to make it clear that parenthood is a responsibility, not a right. We want all parents to fulfil this responsibility to their children.

To achieve successful reunions between a child and their parents, the program relies on parents changing their behaviour in the long term so that they may be able to safely care for their children. It is not simply about removing children permanently. There have been cases where reunification has been achieved and children have continued to live with their parents safely. We recognise that these are tough decisions. That is why the government has invested and delivered specialised programs to ensure that child safety officers have access to the best advice and case planning when tough decisions need to be made.

On the other hand, programs such as the One Chance at Childhood would have been kneecapped by the LNP's election policy of making three per cent cuts to the public sector across the board. Such a policy would have stranded front-line staff in paperwork and gutted our service delivery options, including Once Chance at Childhood. This innovative program is just another way that the Bligh government is supporting Queensland's most vulnerable children. We are standing by our pre-election commitment of maintaining vital front-line services, as evidenced by our record \$638 million budget. As I said, since 2004, we have tripled the budget and doubled the workforce. I think we have 20 times the budget since 1998 when the Liberal and National Party were in government. The Bligh government is committed to delivering on our commitments to children in need, because the health and wellbeing of our children and young people are our No. 1 priority.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, with reference to page 3-4 of the SDS, I note that Child Safety Services will be progressing child protection service reforms to increase direct service delivery capacity. Can the minister outline to the committee the types of service reforms being considered and the improved outcomes that may be achieved?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I welcome the opportunity to talk about increasing direct service delivery capability to improve the safety and protection of Queensland's most vulnerable children and young people. Evolve Interagency Services enhances our ability to respond to children and young people with complex and extreme needs through therapeutic and behavioural support. Evolve is an absolutely great example of the way government departments are working together to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children with complex needs in care. This program is a partnership between Child Safety Services, Disability Services, Queensland Health and the Department of Education and Training. It involves specialist staff, including psychiatrists and therapists, working with our most traumatised and troubled children in care. Evolve is located in every region in the state. As of 30 June 2009, 375 children and young people were clients of this service. I am extremely happy to announce that we will be expanding the Evolve program, with approximately \$4.9 million being allocated to establish additional services in Brisbane south, Ipswich, Toowoomba and Cairns over the next few months.

This is yet another great example of the Bligh government's pre-election commitments to maintaining vital front-line services. The expansion of Evolve services means more children in care who have been traumatised from abuse can access help, including those placed in new therapeutic residential services. The expansion of the Evolve program will assist in decreasing behavioural problems, such as aggression, violence, destructive behaviour, sexual behaviours and self-harming. It will help increase children's ability to stay in a stable placement, participate in school and social activities, as well as improving their academic achievements. The expansion of this program will also benefit foster and residential carers, family members and other professionals, because Evolve specialist staff play a key role in advising them about the best way to care for and support children in care.

As I have outlined, the benefits of the Evolve program are numerous and Child Safety is pleased to fund and utilise such a valuable service. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many Evolve staff for the great work they are doing in creating a brighter, happier future for our most vulnerable children. The Bligh government's commitment to vital front-line services such as child safety cannot be questioned and is evidenced by that record budget of \$638 million in 2009-10.

I would just like to take the opportunity to say that I was with the member for Woodridge yesterday for the 20th birthday of Kingswood Lodge, which is a house that is provided by the Churches of Christ Pathways. I want to commend them for their 20 years of giving to the local community and the great work that they do with young people. It was terrific to meet some young people who were past residents and who wanted to come and celebrate. I am glad that the member for Woodridge was able to join me.

Mr RYAN: Minister, I refer to page 3-4 of the SDS. Could you advise how the additional funding of \$25.3 million in 2009-10 will improve outcomes for children in care?

Mr REEVES: I thank the member for Morayfield. Despite the current economic climate, the Bligh government is committed to maintaining our essential child protection services. That is because the safety and wellbeing of our children and young people across Queensland is and will always remain our No. 1 priority.

I am advised that, as of 31 March, approximately 7,500 children and young people in the child protection system were living away from home. Placements for children requiring care are mainly provided by the non-government sector, although foster and kinship care is provided by both the non-government sector and the department. Most children and young people in care who are unable to safely live at home are able to be placed in family based foster or kinship care.

Unfortunately, there are some children and young people with more complex needs—often caused or exacerbated by the trauma that they have suffered—who need more intense forms of care. This includes specialist foster care, residential care and therapeutic residential care. I am pleased to announce that the 2009-10 state budget has provided a significant funding injection for out-of-home care placements for children and young people, with an annual recurrent increase of \$25.3 million each year, or more than \$100 million over four years. This is the largest increase in placement funding since the government's response to the CMC inquiry in 2004-05. This will go a long way towards expanding the range and mix of placements to reduce the department's reliance on short-term or emergency placements.

Child Safety Services is currently undertaking planning work to ensure that these funds are allocated to the services, types and locations in the greatest need. To do this, the department analysed the demand for placements against the current supply of placements that were funded to see where the gaps and deficiencies were. It is important to ensure that these new funds support the full spectrum of placement types. It is essential that a portion of these funds help and expand foster and kinship care.

Foster and kinship care, as I have said before, are the backbone of the child protection system and they are also the largest type of placements. In 2004, foster and kinship care places were used for approximately 85 per cent of out-of-home care places. We have been able to lift this percentage to about 87 per cent by making available extra support for foster carers. Hopefully, that figure will increase even more. Of course, the enormous success of the recruitment campaign has helped and will continue to help. In addition, the new funds of \$25.3 million per year will build capacity in the areas of specialist foster care, specific response care, residential care and supported independent living.

I have had the pleasure of going to a number of these independent living places. In fact, at one in the electorate of the member for Bundaberg I met a very young gentleman who I will call 'K'. He was a very bright and intelligent young fellow. All he wanted was for me to get Kevin Rudd's autograph for him. So I am happy that I saw Kevin Rudd at the State of Origin and got him to sign the program. Hopefully, young 'K' will have that program shortly. It was also good to have a game of Wii bowling with him and I was pretty happy to get a top score of 220.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister, for that edification. I note on page 3-4 of the SDS that total investment in the Family Intervention Service program in 2009-10 is over \$15.5 million. Can the minister provide to the committee details of the success of this program?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Family Intervention Services program is funded by Child Safety Services and delivered by non-government agencies throughout the state. I am pleased to say that it is a proven resounding success across Queensland. Early intervention and prevention is one of my key priorities in my role as child safety minister and that is why I am pleased to be able to tell of the success of this program. I am also happy to advise the committee that, while the budget papers do correctly state our investment in Family Intervention Services to be more than \$15.5 million, since that time this investment has risen to over \$16 million. These are indeed tough economic times and the Queensland government has made some tough economic decisions to allow programs like this to continue. This is yet another example of the Bligh government's pre-election commitment to maintain funding to our vital front-line services.

Family Intervention Services provides practical common-sense assistance to families in the child protection system. This includes teaching parenting skills that relieve their stress. To reduce family conflict and anxiety, the program also teaches parents how to manage anger, budget, prepare healthy meals, establish routines and seek guidelines in their home. Family Intervention Services also helps departmental staff to make more use of interventions where the child or young person remains at home, providing of course that it is safe for them to be there and to achieve unification where this is in the best interest of the child. Nobody wants to see children taken into care. I would much rather see parents with the ability and willingness to care for their children.

Family Intervention Service also helps with supervised contact visits between children and their parents, and the program coordinates specialised services for family members such as drug and alcohol treatment, financial counselling or domestic violence responses where the issues need to be addressed before a child or young person can be deemed safe. Today there are 35 family intervention services providing support. These services over a full year will work with around 1,200 families.

This year's budget also confirms the government's commitment to child safety and our resolve to working with families whenever we can. We have recently advertised the availability of \$3.8 million a year in new recurrent funding for Family Intervention Services. This funding round closes on Monday, 27 July. I am looking forward to announcing a range of new enhanced services.

I am very much aware of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and young people in our statutory system. At the moment six of our family intervention services operate through Indigenous organisations, although many other family intervention services, such as those based at Mount Isa, largely service Indigenous clients. I am certainly counting on more Indigenous organisations applying for new Family Intervention Services funding. I look forward to announcing those in addition to the work we are doing with safe houses and the \$1.3 million of Family Intervention Services funding for the safe houses plan.

Mr WATT: Minister, on page 3-10 of the SDS I note that partnerships between government agencies were strengthened in 2008-09. Can the minister outline some of the initiatives and outcomes of these strong government partnerships?

Mr REEVES: I thank the member for Everton for the question. He knows that strong government partnerships are very important particularly in providing services for our children and young people. Protecting Queensland's children and young people and keeping them safe from harm is our No. 1 priority. We will leave no stone unturned in our efforts to do so. We are strengthening our partnerships with other government agencies to ensure that we are delivering the best child protection services that we possibly can. I would like to highlight some of the initiatives we are involved in.

The Department of Communities is working closely with the Queensland Police Service, Queensland Health and the Department of Education and Training to further improve our suspected child abuse and neglect system. This includes promoting more joint investigations between Police and Child Safety in child abuse and neglect cases where criminal offences may have occurred.

For a number of years we have been working in partnership with the Department of Education and Training to make sure that children in care have education support plans to improve educational outcomes. These plans identify and promote ways in which we can support children and young people in out-of-home care to reach their full potential in achieving a strong sense of social inclusion. Education support plans have enabled children in care to access tailor-made support, such as teacher aide time and speech and language therapy, to meet their individual needs. As Minister for Sport, I am also pleased to say that education support plans have helped children to participate in special interests such as sport and recreational activities resulting in improved fitness, self-esteem and confidence. They are things that our children require to be able to achieve their personal goals through life.

Another key government partnership is the Evolve Interagency Services, which I mentioned before. The program, as I said, is a partnership between Child Safety Services, Disability Services, Queensland Health and the Department of Education and Training. Cross-government partnerships in relation to youth will also enable an increase in support to young people transitioning from care and recent care leavers under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. An after-care brokerage service will provide practical assistance for approximately 150 care leavers per year to address housing, education and training barriers which, as we know, increase the likelihood of homelessness. Youth leaving care will also have access to youth housing and reintegration support services. This service will provide case management support, specialised learning and employment support, and family and community living support to address the risk of homelessness.

The amalgamation of the various agencies in the new all inclusive Department of Communities will also allow Child Safety Services to forge a stronger partnership. This is yet another example of the Bligh government delivering on the Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland commitment to secure safe and more supportive communities.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions from government members has expired. I call the member for Gladstone.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: I would like to follow up on a question from the member for Bundaberg. Minister, surely a statistical understanding without identifying individuals of the level of sexually transmitted diseases suffered by children taken into care and an indication of any cluster areas is integral to your administration of your portfolio?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I have answered, Queensland Health would be collecting that data. I would assume that, when Queensland Health has information such as what you describe as cluster areas in regard to the level of disease, it would bring that information to the attention of the appropriate authorities—one being Child Safety Services. It would take action in that regard in the area of community health. Queensland Health is the department which collects the information obviously.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: In relation to question on notice No. 10, you stated in relation to the Gladstone child safety centre that the average case load for child safety officers in Gladstone was 18 in 2007, 19 in 2008 and 23 in 2009. Yet there has only been an increase in full-time equivalent staff of 30, 32 and 33 respectively. With escalating case loads, when will additional staff be provided to manage the increased population as well as the increased notifications?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Obviously case loads are a number in itself, but different cases would require different levels of involvement and different levels of work because of the complexity of each individual. So I do not think there is any pure science about this. One case load of 23 cases might not be as complex in nature as another case load of 17 cases that may involve dealing with really complex families or complex issues. Obviously we would all prefer the number to be lower.

The other matter which I have referred to in answer to the member for Bundaberg's question before is that, because the retention rates are increasing and more experienced staff, thankfully, are sticking with Child Safety Services, their ability to handle case loads, even complex case loads, has improved. Experience enables that to occur. As I said, there is no pure science about this. You cannot say that a case load of 23 would be the same as a case load of 16 if they were more complex.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: In relation to question on notice No. 7, you stated that 524 new carers had expressed an interest through the campaign and new carers approved during the campaign had increased to 841. Can you give an indication of the funding allocation for training these new carers and how that training will be provided?

Mr REEVES: Yes, I can. I thank the honourable member for the question. It is great to see you. I have heard you have been unwell, so it is great that you have been able to join the committee and ask me questions. Some carers are trained by Child Safety Services staff themselves and some of our community partners, NGOs, are given funding in that regard to support, retrain and retain the carers. Support for foster carers is expected to be about \$47.2 million this year. That support includes the *Carer handbook*, which assists them with day-to-day issues in caring for children. That money is also used for training, recruitment and retraining.

Obviously it is not a case that people put up their hands and say that they want to become carers and they become carers. To be quite honest, a lot of people express interest in becoming a carer but, once they get into training and get an understanding of the commitment and some of the complexities they will face, they decide not to pursue that training. I take this opportunity to thank those NGOs who look after foster carers. We provide online training through the Foster Parent College, which is regularly accessed by 832 individual carers and agency members as well.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Minister, in relation to a question on notice in parliament, question No. 689—and this again relates to the Gladstone child safety centre—of the 212 children in child protection orders nine required special accommodation and supervision arrangements. I do understand the issues with complex behaviours. Can you advise how often these difficult children are in unsupervised accommodation—for example, motels?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I will try to get the specifics for you with regard to Gladstone. If you can imagine a situation where it is late on a Friday evening and Child Safety Services gets a call and needs to find accommodation for a family—it could be one child or it could be several children—because they are at risk of harm, Child Safety Services placement staff do whatever they can to find a placement but in some cases the only accommodation that is available is commercial accommodation. The alternative is for them to stay in that situation of neglect or harm. Our view is to get them out of that situation of neglect or harm, and that is what occurs.

Thankfully the use of commercial accommodation has reduced dramatically. For example, in 2007-08 only 2.7 per cent of children in care required commercial accommodation compared with 7.4 per cent in 2004-05. The highly successful foster care recruitment campaign that I mentioned before—841 new carers since May 2008—will assist as well because we will have more places in that regard. With regard to Gladstone, I might get back to you with regard to the specifics. I am not sure whether we have that information, but I will find out.

Mr DEMPSEY: With reference to the Service Delivery Statement 3-22 and following on from the previous question about motels, how many children in out-of-home care were reported as missing or unaccounted for for more than 24 hours in the period 2008-09?

Mr REEVES: I will get the specifics for you. I thank the honourable member for the question. I want to refer to the member for Bundaberg's stunt for the day of the mobile phone number. There is a 24-hour service. The number is 1800177135. It is accessible by mobile and landline, which makes sense.

Mr DEMPSEY: Do you want me to try it now?

Mr REEVES: Are you dialling 1800177135?

Mr DEMPSEY: I am dialling the number as advertised on your department's website.

Mr REEVES: The other line is an inquiry line which is only used during business hours and only accessed by landline. The 24-hour service, which is 1800177135, is accessible by both mobile and landline. I would think if you cannot get through to that you should speak to your provider.

Mr DEMPSEY: Why is it advertised on your department's website, and I have it here in multicolours: 'Report suspected child abuse, 1800811810'? You can dial that number from a landline but you cannot dial it from a mobile. I just think that is insane with today's technology and given the fact that the majority of people in this room and the majority of young people have a mobile. I ask the minister if he could take steps towards fixing that.

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member and I will review that for you. I would just say that the 24-hour service is accessible by both mobile and landline, but I will check that out. If that can be made available to mobile phones, which it should be, I will see what we can do. Obviously, the 1800 number is provided so that people are not paying for the call.

Mr DEMPSEY: That is right. I will go to another question. How many children in out-of-home care were removed because of a carer parent or guardian—

Mr REEVES: Sorry, I did not answer your first question.

Mr DEMPSEY: You were going to get back to me.

Mr REEVES: I have got it.

Mr DEMPSEY: So you have it now?

Mr REEVES: Yes.

Mr DEMPSEY: You can take it on notice, if you want, because we are running out of time.

Mr REEVES: No, I am quite happy to answer the question now. In the year ending 31 March 2009—and you would understand that we do not have the up-to-date figures from June because it has only just finished—50 young people were recorded as absconded. The full data for 2008-09 will be available in September 2009. We are dealing with young adolescents and I would assume that, out of everybody, young people are the ones who are sometimes transient, whether they are children in out-of-home care or young people living with their families. As I said, for the year ending 31 March, 50 young people were recorded as absconded.

Mr DEMPSEY: Given that the computer system we have now is so sophisticated and considering this is an estimates committee where we are budgeting on the next financial years, why are you relying on that data? Are you just given an estimate for the year ahead as far as funding is concerned? You are not able to provide up-to-date information.

Mr REEVES: Treasury fund us on the amount they have given us, and that is the budget we have got to work with. You are talking about the timeliness of information. Typically, it takes about three months for data from central information systems to be available for reporting. This means data from the 2008-09 financial year will become available by the end of September 2009. There are three key reasons for this: national reporting requirements, data quality processes and analysis interpretation.

We could guesstimate data for you, but I want to make sure I present the committee with the most up-to-date, correct and quality data that is available. We follow national reporting requirements in that regard. We are required, along with Community and Youth Justice Services and Disability Services, to comply with national reporting guidelines. This stipulates that data extraction for a financial year can only occur eight weeks following the end of the period. This enables time for activities that started close to the end of the financial year to be finalised and entered into the central information, such as child protection investigations. During this eight-week period, we typically see the number of substantiations increase by around 1,000 or 15 per cent.

This time is also used to perform targeted data cleansing activities—for example, to ensure the missing details about where a child is currently located or the type of harm experienced while in care are entered onto the central information system. The data is then extracted and checked over a minimum two-week period. A further two weeks is spent preparing data tables and text for inclusion in reports, public statements and publications on the Child Safety Services website. The analysis and interpretation of this data is critical to ensure a clear understanding of how this information relates to the performance of Child Safety Services. The availability of data from the central information system is subject to the quality of information entered on ICMS, how the information is recorded and stored and the capacity to bring it online.

As I said, we are forever improving and evolving this system and improving and evolving ICMS. Once again, I remind the member that ICMS is a great tool that all the staff I have spoken to—and I have visited six out of the seven zonal offices and 22 out of the 50 child safety service centres—have spoken highly of. Obviously, all computer systems have their challenges, but we will be forever improving this as it is an evolving system. I am thankful for the staff's feedback on that.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, with a record budget that you are clinging to as a way of deflecting criticism, can you please explain why the record number of children in out-of-home care is increasing and why a record number of children that are known to your department are, I hate to say it, passing away? Shouldn't we see a decline in these numbers, not an increase, if more money than ever before is being targeted at child protection services?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I remind him that it is a record budget and I remind him of the last budget of the Liberal and National Party. On page 24 of the 1998-99 budget—and I think the minister at the time was Kev Lingard—child protection received \$32 million from the 1997-98 budget.

The member for Bundaberg is right. It is increasing, but it is increasing because some family members are neglecting and, what is probably worse, harming children and young people who are their family members. Child Safety Services will not run away. We do not apologise for taking non-Indigenous or Indigenous children away from harm or neglect when we believe their wellbeing is threatened.

I know the member likes this snatch and grab statement that he says in every second press release. I cannot say it better than the *North West Star*, which for those who do not know is the Mount Isa paper. The Mount Isa paper had an editorial which attacked an opposition spokesperson, and it was the first time I have ever seen an editorial do that. The editorial quoted Jack Dempsey, the member for Bundaberg, accusing the government of having a snatch and grab mentality of taking children, particularly from Aboriginal families, out of the care of their parents without addressing the cause of their problem. The editor asked: 'What is the alternative? Leave children in an unsafe living environment for want of a better statistic? Surely not.' I cannot say it better than that. The reality is that I congratulate Child Safety Services staff for the great work they are doing. They are ensuring that children are getting away from the harm and neglect that, unfortunately, some of their family members are inflicting upon them. You can criticise the fact that 7,500 children and young people are living in out-of-home care.

Mr DEMPSEY: They are record numbers.

Mr REEVES: It is a record—I agree with you—but child protection is everybody's responsibility. It is the community's responsibility. Parents have to be responsible. We in the Department of Communities will provide programs, intervention, early intervention. The reality is that early intervention will work over time but these children and young people cannot be allowed to stay in homes where they are at risk of being neglected and, more importantly, harmed.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, how many children in out-of-home care were removed because a carer parent had their carer status cancelled because of a crime they had committed or because of inappropriate conduct?

Mr REEVES: I will get some information for you. I notice you did not refer to any of the SDS, but that is all right. We are enjoying this.

The reality is that there comes a time when some carers do not do the right thing but, thankfully, it is only a small minority of them. Obviously, when action occurs, it is important for Child Safety Services to act. As a result, they act and they remove children. I should say that all foster carers go through a long process, as I explained earlier. They all have to have blue cards and other adults in the household have to have blue cards. In regard to that specific question, I will try to get that information before the committee finishes this afternoon.

In my time left, I want to congratulate all of the foster carers who do a terrific job. I particularly want to thank those new ones who have joined on board. As I said to you before, some foster carers—a very small minority—do the wrong thing and then Child Safety acts upon that. As a result of that, if criminal charges have to be laid they are laid.

CHAIR: The time for questions from non-government members has expired. I call the member for Woodridge.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I refer to my question on notice regarding the hugely successful foster carer recruitment campaign. What has been the response generally from Indigenous community members to the campaign?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Child Safety relies heavily on dedicated kinship and foster carers throughout Queensland who are the backbone of our child protection system. The foster carer recruitment campaign which commenced in May 2008—for those who might have missed it this afternoon—recruited 841 new foster and kinship carers, far exceeding the campaign target of 500. To encourage Indigenous Queenslanders to consider becoming carers, the campaign's creative component was developed to incorporate a separate Indigenous stream, including a television and radio advertisement as well as a print component. These advertisements were broadcast widely through Indigenous communities via the Imparja Television network and Indigenous radio networks from mid May to the end of August 2008.

I am delighted to advise that Indigenous communities have responded very well to the campaign. Impressively, 5.24 per cent of the total number of expressions of interest received for the campaign were identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. Given that Indigenous people comprise only 2.6 per cent of the adult population, this indicates a strong response by Indigenous communities to the campaign—double in fact. Clearly this is a success in anyone's book. The foster and kinship carer recruitment campaign was officially completed on 30 June 2009, and to date 29 Indigenous Queenslanders have been approved as foster carers and six have been approved as kinship carers. I

would like to thank the big-hearted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who answered the call. You are helping us to achieve our goal for Indigenous children in care to stay connected to their kin and community and culture.

One of the things I am going to be working on with the other part of my portfolio as Minister for Sport is looking at innovative ways to try to recruit some more Indigenous kinship and foster carers. Obviously, Sport and Recreation Services provide funding for sporting organisations to provide services in Indigenous communities as well as running programs themselves in Indigenous communities. If we can use them to get some leads—for want of a better word—to recruit Indigenous kinship carers and foster carers in those communities, I think it would be a good thing. I am going to be working on that with Sport and Recreation Services and Child Safety Services to develop some innovative ways of recruiting and marketing in that regard.

Mr RYAN: Minister, I refer to page 3-22 of the SDS highlighting the number of children not subject to protective orders. Minister, can you please provide an example of why a child who is not subject to a protective order may be receiving assistance from the department?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government has as its No. 1 priority the safety and wellbeing of all Queensland children. Every case which comes to the attention of Child Safety Services is different. The department, as any parent or concerned person would expect, treats them on an individual basis. When a child has been assessed as being in need of protection, Child Safety Services is required to open a case for ongoing intervention. There are two types of such cases: intervention with parental agreement or intervention through a child protection order from the court.

As members would undoubtedly be aware, a court order may result in a child being placed in out-of-home care under the custody and guardianship of the chief executive; however, an intervention with parental agreement allows Child Safety to work with the family while the child is still at home by providing support and assistance to address any child protection issues.

This agreement is generally short term and intensive in nature. It is usual for children to remain at home for all or most of the intervention period. When warranted, the children can be placed in out-of-home care with the consent of their parents. This is called a child protection care agreement and is for a duration of up to six months while parents work to address the concerns for their children.

IPAs, as we know them, are considered appropriate where a child is in need of protection but it is likely that, with support and intervention, the parents will be able to meet the protection needs of their child in the future. This is based on an assessment of parents' ability and willingness to work cooperatively with the department to meet the child's protection and care needs. They also need to adhere to the case plan and meet the protection and care needs of the child when the intervention is completed.

IPAs do not require the use of a court order and do not lessen Child Safety's responsibility to meet the child's protection and care needs. Each child has a child safety officer who is responsible for the ongoing work with the child and family. Case planning with the family includes strategies to lessen the risk factors, enabling the child to remain safely at home. For example, a case may involve a family who have three young children under the age of seven with both parents living at home. Child Safety works with those to come up with intervention with parental agreements.

Before the Child Safety Services staff depart and the Sport and Recreation staff come for the next session, I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for the terrific work they have done to prepare for this estimates hearing so that the committee can gain a full understanding of Child Safety Services.

CHAIR: We are going through until 4.15.

Mr REEVES: I have jumped the gun. I take that opportunity because I might forget later. I take that opportunity to thank them for the great work they have done in preparing me for the committee. I jumped the gun. Sorry about that. I will not have to do it again.

I do have an answer for the member for Gladstone. I can confirm that in 2008-09 no child is recorded as being placed in commercial accommodation in Gladstone. Having said that, there are a number of alternative arrangements for children with challenging behaviours, including transitional placements. Transitional placements are closely supervised arrangements that, as the name suggests, are used to transition children from the interim arrangement to the best possible model for the child's individual circumstances. Many of the traditional transitional placements are provided in most cases by non-government organisations.

CHAIR: Minister, I note on page 3-10 of the SDS the strong relationship with the community sector. Can the minister highlight the jobs generated and supported in the community sector by Child Safety Services?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. For Child Safety to fulfil our role in providing for the safety and wellbeing of children and young people, partnerships with the community sector and other government agencies are vital. The Bligh government is standing by its election

commitment of maintaining vital front-line services, as evidenced by a record \$638 million budget. More than half of Child Safety's budget is spent through our external partners, and most of this investment creates sustainable jobs for Queenslanders.

Unlike the opposition, which would have seen three per cent cuts across-the-board, the Bligh government is committed to maintaining and creating jobs in these tough economic times. Our funding for non-government community sector partners, through evolved services—our expenditure and direct costs supporting the care of children—is estimated to support the employment of nearly 3,000 full-time equivalent jobs in Queensland in 2009-10. Because there is fairly high level of job sharing and part-time workers in the community sector, many more workers benefit from this investment in the community. In fact, it is worth noting that Child Safety funding contributes to the employment of more staff outside the department than within Child Safety Services. This is a practical demonstration of our partnership with external providers and a strong indication of interdependency between Child Safety and our partners. In 2008-09 we provided grant funding to over 280 non-government services and purchased additional placement services from another 73 organisations.

I also have to highlight the strong indication of our support for jobs in the community sector. The Bligh government's 2009-10 state budget includes an extra \$414 million to support the community sector in the challenges they face, including wages challenges. In 2009-10 Child Safety Services will provide an extra \$12.1 million and maintain critical services for dependent clients and maximise services provided to vulnerable children and their families. This will increase to an extra \$28.4 million by 2012-13. Child Safety Services is prioritising the allocation of this funding to those services working with children and their families who are fully supported by or dependent upon their service provision. These services include out-of-home care and accommodation services for children removed from their home due to abuse and neglect. The department will also provide supplementary funding to these services working with vulnerable families and children. This includes counselling and support services for families at risk of entering statutory child protection and those services provided by recognised entities in respect of cultural information.

Mr WATT: Minister, with reference to page 3-10 of the SDS, I note that training was a key achievement for the department in 2008-09. Can the minister outline what level of mandatory training front-line staff receive?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Bligh government is committed to continuing delivering its essential child safety services. Child safety officers do a difficult job that few would put their hands up to do. Every day these officers are doing some great work to protect our children in need. Child Safety Services provides ongoing training to front-line staff to ensure they provide high-quality services to clients. The department requires all new child safety officers to undergo mandatory training as soon as possible after starting. Child safety officers' entry-level training consists of five phases of learning and takes 12 months to complete.

Today I am pleased to announce that Queensland is leading the way in providing cutting-edge nationally accredited training for its front-line workers. From 1 May this year, all workers employed by the department who successfully complete an entry-level training program will exit with a vocational graduation certificate in community services practice (statutory child protection). This initiative is the first of its kind in Australia and ensures all child safety officers will attain training accreditation in high-level vocational qualifications specific to Queensland's child protection work.

During the 12 months of mandatory training, child safety officers attend intensive face-to-face workshops and workplace simulations and complete workplace learning documents and case studies as well as a research project. The training is based on adult and workplace learning principles and is designed so that it minimises the time workers need to spend offline and away from child protection work while maintaining high-level skills and development.

An important part of mandatory training involves engaging people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. The Indigenous engagement training is a two-day program which helps develop a workforce which is proficient in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families. This is an important part of the departmental strategy to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child protection system. It produces officers who are proficient in delivering culturally relevant, responsible and accessible child safety services to Aboriginal children and families and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The training also encourages development of strong and productive relationships with key Indigenous stakeholders, specifically Indigenous recognised entities.

Quality training of child safety officers leads to confident and supported workers, increased job satisfaction and retention. More importantly, it allows the department to continue providing high-quality services and develop stronger and more rigorous relationships with their partners and stakeholders. Our quality training demonstrates the Bligh government's commitment to deliver on its commitment to children in need.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, I refer to page 3-10 of the SDS and note that 40 additional permanent service delivery staff were appointed in areas of highest workload. Can the minister detail the valuable role these officers perform and how they assist child safety officers?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. In last year's budget, Child Safety Services stated it would employ 40 new front-line workers. After careful planning regarding the best possible use of these positions, these officers were appointed in the following high-demand areas. Thirteen child safety officers have been employed in various child safety service centres to help reduce case loads in identified areas. Seven principal child safety officers are being trialled in various child safety service centres in seven locations with a focus on managing complex cases, co-working and mentoring less experienced child safety officers, and providing career path opportunities to assist in staff retention. One team leader was provided for the Gulf Child Safety Service Centre to support service delivery to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in that area. Ten additional family group meeting coordinators were allocated to build on the success of this program and early identification of appropriate kinship carers in consultation with parents and other family members. These staff also assist in managing the workload of family group meeting conveners to ensure the department meets its legislative requirements. These staff assist in improving the quality of case plans and allow adequate follow-up of children subject to ongoing intervention by the department, in particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Six full-time equivalent positions were allocated for the Mackay and Bowen child safety service centres to accommodate the emerging demand and growth in the Bowen Basin catchment. One PO4 postadoption officer position was created and two PO4 court service officer positions were created to meet the unprecedented demand for court services, and these positions will assist court services processes across services.

I am pleased to advise that the allocation of these staff has made a significant contribution to front-line services across Queensland—yet another example of the Bligh government standing by its commitment of creating jobs.

Mr RYAN: I refer to page 3-4 of the SDS and the \$15.1 million provided over four years for career progression of front-line staff. Minister, please outline to the committee the success of this initiative.

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know that, as he has a family member working in Child Safety Services, he would be interested in career progression. Child safety officers do a tremendous job in what can be extremely challenging circumstances. The Bligh government is committed to supporting and retaining our skilled staff in whatever ways we can. We have several projects which have resulted in boosting career paths and support for front-line staff.

During 2008 the front-line work analysis and job design project carried out detailed research and consultation across the department and with universities and unions. They were investigating the qualifications, career progression and expansion of Child Safety Services' front-line workforce. Several initiatives were recommended by the project team to address career progression of the staff. One was the introduction of an accelerated progression for eligible front-line staff to become senior child safety officers at a higher level if they successfully demonstrated required competencies. I am pleased to report that the accelerated progression for these front-line staff who had three years experience started in November 2008 and, as at 30 June this year, 285 staff have been assessed against the criteria and competencies required and progressed to the higher level. This accelerated progression will continue to be accessed by eligible staff on an ongoing basis. In a recent survey, more than one-third of those employees indicated that it had significantly impacted on their intention to stay in the organisation.

Child Safety is also starting a trial to enable 20 experienced and skilled child safety support officers who have completed a diploma in community services to undertake child safety officer training. This means that they can progress into the professional ranks following successful accreditation, thus opening up another career path for them.

Finally, we have been undertaking a program which has seen seven principal child safety officer positions established across the state. These will provide support and mentoring to new staff and allow experienced child safety officers to develop their skills in these areas before moving into team leader roles. Initial indications suggest that this program has been successful both for the new principal officers and the new child safety officers.

Child safety officers undertake many tasks in their day-to-day business of protecting children from harm. As a government we must secure our workforce for the short, medium and long term in order to deliver the best possible child protection services in Queensland. By investing in our staff and providing them with career pathways, the Bligh government is improving the quality of child protection services for our most vulnerable children.

CHAIR: The time for questions from government members has expired. We will move to questions from non-government members. I call the member for Bundaberg.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, how many children in care have been tested for swine flu and how many have returned a positive result?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I note the honourable member has been busy sitting there because he has released two press releases without even moving, which is pretty interesting.

Mr DEMPSEY: Efficiency.

Mr REEVES: Obviously he is not the person writing the press releases or approving them. I would like to make a comment about one of the press releases that states that 'Child Safety Minister Phil Reeves' preference for sport over Child Safety was confirmed during the estimates hearing this afternoon.' I think a personal attack like that does not do you any justice. If you have a look at the record budget of \$638 million, whilst sport and recreation is important, its budget is \$142 million. I think that speaks for itself about what my priorities and what the Bligh government's priorities are. If the member actually had written this press release it was written obviously before listening to my answers to his questions. I will say again that those budgets are indicative only and will be finalised depending on the number of child placements and support required. Resources will be directed to where they are needed most. Obviously, it would be much better to wait rather than write the press release before the estimates hearing and have what I have said. I do not think anything I have said—

Mr DEMPSEY: You are floundering, Phil.

Mr REEVES: I do not think anything that I have said has shown that I have a preference for Sport over Child Safety.

Mr DEMPSEY: What about the pyjama thing outside?

CHAIR: The member for Bundaberg will cease interjecting.

Mr REEVES: The Pyjama Foundation is about children in care. The Pyjama Foundation is about reading—

Mr DEMPSEY: Relevance?

CHAIR: Order! The member for Bundaberg will cease interjecting.

Mr REEVES: I am happy if you want to criticise the Pyjama Foundation—

Mr DEMPSEY: No way.

Mr REEVES:—because I will pass that on to them. The Pyjama Foundation has nothing to do with sport. The Pyjama Foundation is about going into foster carers' and kinship carers' homes and reading to these young people and giving them a lifelong love of reading.

Mr DEMPSEY: It is a great program.

Mr REEVES: I cannot believe that you are using this estimates hearing to not only downgrade the Pyjama Foundation but also to put—

Mr DEMPSEY: He is misleading, Chair.

Mr REEVES:—out press releases before you actually even ask the question referring to how I have answered the question.

Mr DEMPSEY: Could you please answer the question?

Mr REEVES: It is unbelievable. Children in care will receive the same medical care as any other children. The health department, as I have said previously, keeps those particular records.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, in answer to question on notice No. 8 you claim that your government is on track to roll out the health passport program, yet it has taken the government 2½ years to process 2,373 children. How do you expect to process over 5,000 children in the next 18 months to meet your target?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. We have seen his stunt relating to mobiles accessing that number and then the stunt of putting out press releases written before he has even asked the questions in the estimates hearing. With regard to the phone number, we have referred the issue to the department's telecommunications unit, who advise us that they are not aware mobile phones are not able to access the number as advertised and we have referred this to Optus to rectify the problem.

With regard to child health passports, many children in out-of-home care have a range of health issues due to their history of abuse and neglect. In recognition of the critical importance of good health to a child's long-term wellbeing, the Bligh government is committed to implementing child health passports. A child health passport is a generic name given to an initiative to meet the health needs of children in out-of-home care. This process involves gathering information about the child's health history from a parent, a health professional completing a health assessment if required, recording relevant information ensuring any required medical follow-up treatment is undertaken. Health assessments, if required, are undertaken after 30 days of a child being placed in out-of-home care. The health plan is the name given to the plan developed to meet any health needs identified.

This initiative commenced in 2007 for all children in care with a commitment to extend the initiative to other children already in care, children under four and young people transitioning from care. In 2007 Child Safety set itself a goal that every eligible child in out-of-home care would have a child health passport by December 2010. Since commencement in January 2007 to 31 May this year, 2,373 children across the state have a health passport.

It is important to note that just because a child is in care but has not gone through the formal child health passport does not mean that their health has been neglected. Many of these children's carers see their doctors and other health professionals as well. Child Safety Services advises that it will continue the streamlined health screening process to ensure that we do not double up on health assessments and plans already occurring. Foster and kinship carers do a terrific job. As I have said before, part of that job is to ensure that the right health outcomes occur with the children in care, and they do that.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, a report released two weeks ago found the department was too adversarial and was overpowering towards parents in the system. I ask: considering police and even DPI inspectors are required to record and caution any person who commits a crime, should not child safety officers also be bound by the same rules of evidence and be required to record and caution all parents when investigating suspected abuse? Would this requirement not provide more accountability and reliable evidence when child protection applications are presented to the court?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Child Safety Services works in close cooperation with the Queensland police force and we are bound by the same rules.

Mr DEMPSEY: The same rules of taking evidence, Minister?

Mr REEVES: We are bound by the same rules of the Child Protection Act and we work closely with the Queensland Police Service when we become aware that criminal acts have been committed against children or young people.

Mr DEMPSEY: So you do not have the same requirements as the Police Service and DPI officers to take evidence?

Mr REEVES: The child protection officer is not a police officer. If we believe that a criminal act has occurred we refer the person to the appropriate authority, being the police.

Mr DEMPSEY: Surely when you turn up at an incident to negate possible conflicts of interest later on, would it not be simpler—it might be something you might look at in the department—to have conversations recorded for the benefit of both parties involved, not just the department?

Mr REEVES: The child safety officers are not police. If child safety officers believe criminal activity has occurred they will report to the appropriate authorities, being the police. Child protection officers abide by the law every time and they abide by the Child Protection Act. Our No. 1 role is to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children, and that is what they do. It is our No. 1 priority and that is our focus. If they come across what they believe is criminal activity or actions, then they will refer them to the appropriate authority, being the police.

Mr DEMPSEY: Are they not retrieving evidence that will be used in a court matter later on?

Mr REEVES: The evidence that the child safety officers gather is obviously tested with the Childrens Court when they go for agreement.

Mr DEMPSEY: So you do not record at all?

Mr REEVES: The investigation and assessments will include direct interviews with a range of family members including, where possible, the child. It will also incorporate in the assessment information from professional agencies who know the child and the parents. Determinations are made about the child's immediate safety and about the presence of factors that may increase the risk of harm to the child and about the parent's ability and willingness to protect the child from harm. If, as I said, they become aware that a criminal act has occurred, the appropriate people to deal with that are the police, and that is what they do.

Mr DEMPSEY: For clarification, I was just looking at other ways of actually protecting child safety officers.

Mr REEVES: If that is a question, Child Safety deal with—

Mr DEMPSEY: No, it was a clarification.

CHAIR: A question is a question and the minister is entitled to answer.

Mr REEVES: Child safety officers work very closely with the police on many cases. When difficult situations need to occur in cases such as having to remove children from care, police obviously, as you would understand, accompany the child safety officers in a range of circumstances. I want to get rid of this theory that child safety officers and the police do not work closely together. Child safety officers work very closely with the Queensland Police Service. I commend the Queensland Police Service for the great work they do and the great assistance they give our child safety officers, particularly in remote

places in Queensland where child safety officers rely heavily on the Queensland Police Service for both support and for identifying matters that Child Safety Services needs to know about. I congratulate the Queensland Police Service on the great work that they do in that regard.

CHAIR: The time for questioning allocated to non-government members has expired. We have time for a couple of questions before we cease this session at 4.15 pm. Minister, page 3-10 of the SDS refers to mentoring and support of departmental staff, contributing to better retention rates. We all know that child safety officers deal with some of the most tragic and horrific circumstances of child abuse. What mechanisms are in place to support staff safely, both physically and emotionally?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Before answering I thought I might bring to a close the outstanding matters. In relation to the question about child sexual abuse where a sibling was deemed responsible, I can advise that Child Safety tells me that data regarding children for whom harm has been substantiated and their relationship to the person believed responsible for the sexual abuse includes siblings is recorded in ICMS and is available to staff. The question was asked, 'How many carers had their carer status removed as a result of criminal activity?' Not all carers who receive a negative notice have children placed. Once a notice is received, the Child Safety Services manager receives a direction to remove the subject child immediately. The number of negative notices is 28 issued for criminal activity. I think that answers all the questions from both the member for Gladstone and the member for Bundaberg.

Child safety officers do a difficult job. Few in the community put their hands up to do so. As I have previously told the House, child safety officers have been involved in some horrific cases including child deaths. It is not an easy job and child safety officers should be applauded for doing such a difficult job.

Given the Bligh government's target under Q2 to improve the health of Queenslanders, I am pleased to have the opportunity to talk about how Child Safety promotes safe work practices, support for staff and healthy lifestyles. Balancing the safety of Queensland's children with the safety of our own government staff is very difficult and challenging and something that we take very seriously. Having confident, safe staff is the first step to ensuring the safety of our clients.

I am pleased that Child Safety has a comprehensive range of initiatives to keep staff safe and well in the workplace. Regular workplace health and safety inspections are conducted. Child Safety Services staff are trained in the relevant workplace health and safety awareness, non-violent crisis intervention, driver behaviour, first aid and emergency management. Personal safety risk assessments and safety plans have also been developed. Security reviews of staff safety in service centres and outside centres have been carried out and identified the importance of communication and duress systems when staff are on the road.

Like many departments, we service a number of remote communities, and Child Safety Services has reviewed the houses provided for the staff living in remote locations to identify and minimise security risks. Security criteria included assessing locations, lighting, door and window security, privacy, communications, electrical switchboard and smoke detection. Child Safety Services works closely with the Department of Public Works to enhance the housing security for staff living there.

Broader physical and psychological wellbeing programs have also been implemented over the last 12 months. The Healthy for Life program has an interactive portal which brings together a range of government programs. In the main, we realise that staff at Child Safety are our No. 1 asset. We identify the need to put programs in place to help these dedicated staff members. I am proud of our track record in that regard.

Mr WATT: With reference to page 3-10 of the SDS, I note a key achievement for the department in 2008-09 was job redesign that supported improved retention rates. Can the minister please provide the committee with further information on this initiative?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. As I mentioned previously, the government is committed to continue delivering its essential child safety services. Child Safety staff are a much valued part of the Child Safety Services team, and I congratulate them on their decisions in what are often very trying situations. It is complex and demanding work which needs people with a range of skills and experience. As such, the government has reshaped the requirements of entry-level child safety positions to reflect the fact that people who have a range of skills and backgrounds are needed.

In November last year the department of child safety approved the expansion of mandatory entry. This has enabled the expansion of the applicant pool to include graduates with qualifications of education to include early childhood—primary and senior—psychology, nursing, occupational therapy, health sciences, anthropology, justice studies, criminal and law. Prior to this change in policy the only qualifications accepted as a minimum prerequisite for employment as a child safety officer were bachelor degrees in social work, behavioural science or human services. I believe that is a great initiative, and I look forward to that assisting as we go through.

I notice that the member for Bundaberg has put out another press release about the child deaths to rise. I am aware the opposition has put out a media release regarding this. I have said time and time again that the death of any child in these circumstances is an absolute tragedy. Behind the death of

every child is a traumatised family dealing with the grief of the loss of the young child. The opposition spokesperson is retraumatising the families and communities of these children for his own grubby political purposes. I note that he does not mention that 515 children overall died tragically; he only mentions the 79 children who died who were known to the department in the previous three years.

I think the actions of the member for Bundaberg in terms of some of his questions and some of his press releases he has put out today show the level the opposition will go to. Rather than support our foster carers and rather than support organisations like the Pyjama Foundation and rather than support our great staff at Child Safety Services they condemn them. I congratulate the great work that our foster carers and kinship carers do. I particularly thank our Child Safety Services staff for the great work they have done in preparing for the estimates but, more importantly, for the great work they do in protecting our most vulnerable children and young people. I look forward to working with them further.

CHAIR: The committee will now have a short break and will resume at 4.30 pm to continue with the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport.

Proceedings suspended from 4.16 pm to 4.30 pm

CHAIR: The hearing of Estimates Committee G is resumed. The committee will continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport focusing now on the sport. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure be agreed to. I call the member for Bundaberg.

Mr DEMPSEY: I refer the minister to page 35 of the capital statement. Can the minister confirm that there is no capital contribution from the state government in the budget documents for the building of Carrara stadium over the next four years, only the interest payments on the state's contribution to the building. If there are only to be interest payments, who is supplying the loan money to the state government?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. A total of \$126 million towards the redevelopment has now been committed comprising \$60 million from the Queensland government, \$36 million from the Australian government, \$20 million from the Gold Coast City Council and \$10 million from the AFL. I do not think the premise of your question is correct.

The capital statement and the outyears have an allocation for the interest payments plus paying off the \$60 million. The state's \$60 million contribution will be paid in three stages—\$2 million on 1 July 2009, \$7 million in 2010-11 and \$51 million in 2011-12.

Mr DEMPSEY: I refer the minister to the SDS at page 3-30. Is the minister aware why the government has estimated that the percentage of Queensland schools accessing the department's sport and recreation programs will actually drop by nine per cent?

Mr REEVES: You have been very cute with your questions today, member for Bundaberg. For the first time you have actually asked me questions. The reality is the estimate for 2008-09 was 15 per cent and we actually achieved 59 per cent. You do not talk about us having a target of 15 per cent and exceeding it by nearly four times. We have probably been a bit conservative by putting 50 per cent. We might be in a bit of trouble if we exceed that target by four times because that will mean it is 200 per cent.

This is a great success story. We had a target of 15 per cent but we had 59 per cent of schools accessing the department's active recreation program. That is a great outcome for Sports and Recreation. More importantly, it is a great outcome for the children who attend our schools that their schools are accessing this great program. It is a compliment to Sport and Recreation the suite of programs and activities that it has in the active recreation program. I congratulate them for that.

I will add further to your previous question. It is interesting that the member mentioned Carrara. I am still unsure what the opposition's position is on Carrara. I remember before the election that your policy was that state government funds should not be put into Carrara. If I remember rightly, over the 10 years the economic benefit of that redevelopment for the Gold Coast and its surrounds will be about \$345 million. It will be the launching pad if we go ahead with a Commonwealth Games bid.

It was interesting that that was the member's first question. We are still not too sure what the policy of the opposition is about that. We stand ready and willing to support the Gold Coast sport and recreation community in that regard. We also have the great result of achieving that 59 per cent. I think you are being a bit cute with your questions but that should not surprise me after some of your earlier questions.

Mr DEMPSEY: You mentioned the Commonwealth Game's bid. What infrastructure have you got planned for the Commonwealth Games?

Mr REEVES: Obviously it will depend on whether we are successful in the bid but Carrara will be built for Aussie rules and other sports. It will have a capacity for 25,000 spectators—23,000 seats and probably a standing area for 2,000 people. It will be able to be enlarged to reach the capacity required for a Commonwealth Games, which is 40,000.

The Premier has announced a Commonwealth Games Reference Committee. I am a member of that committee. A former minister for sport, who happens to be from your side of politics, is also a member of that committee. I am sure Mick Veivers will do a great job. We had our first meeting on Tuesday. I look forward to working with Mick and others on the committee. The others on the committee are the Minister for Tourism and Fair Trading and member for Southport, Kevin Newberry from Stadiums Queensland, Glynis Nunn, Tracy Stockwell, Peter Comiskey from QSport, Mike Victor from the Queensland Commonwealth Games Foundation and a legend in the cycling world, Bob Gordon who is the recently retired editor of the *Gold Coast Bulletin* and Ron Clarke the Mayor of the Gold Coast City Council. We are looking forward to going through the process of identifying whether we should have a bid and what that will mean in dollar terms and what that will mean in terms of economic benefit for the Gold Coast and South-East Queensland.

Mr DEMPSEY: What is the time frame for assessing that?

Mr REEVES: My understanding is that in 2010 the decision will be made by the Australian Commonwealth Games Association who are the ones who do the bid. They have indicated their support for the Gold Coast but we are working through the process.

Mr DEMPSEY: Have you looked at other possible venues throughout Queensland and regional Queensland to host the Commonwealth Games, places such as Bundaberg?

Mr REEVES: I was waiting for that. The reality is that the Commonwealth Games Foundation says that a host city has to conduct all the core sports and a majority of other sports. The Gold Coast is about the eight biggest city in Australia. I think it is ready and willing to do this. We have to ensure that it stacks up financially and in terms of the economic impact. The ultimate decision will be made about mid-2011.

Mr DEMPSEY: I refer the minister to the Service Delivery Statement at page 3-8. What grants and subsidies did the government make available to sporting organisations in 2008-09 and what programs have not been made available in 2009-10?

Mr REEVES: This gives me a good opportunity to talk about the programs. I am bit upset that the member for Moggill is not here to ask me a question about the statement he made on Saturday. It was an appalling statement. For the record, the member for Moggill made a statement with regard to funding and he said it was pork barrelling. I should remind him that of all the approvals for funding in 2008-09, some 47.73 per cent—and this included major facilities, minor facilities, club developments, community partnership, local sport and recreation programs, disaster assistance programs and young athlete assistance programs—were in non-government seats. In fact, for minor facilities some 55.31 per cent were in non-government seats. For club developments 56.29 per cent of the funding went to non-government seats. That puts the mistruths of the member for Moggill on Saturday to bed.

All core programs were conducted in 2008-09 and it is likely that all core programs will be conducted in 2009-10. I will add though that I am going to be working with QSport and Sport and Recreation to review all the programs that are in place. Some of these programs have been around for about 20 years. I need to have a look at whether these programs are reaching their target.

We obviously want to ensure that Queensland becomes the healthiest state by 2020. We also want to make sure that volunteering goes up by the year 2020. They are our Q2 targets. I am focused on them. I am focused on ensuring that sport and recreation programs and grants provide support at the club and community level.

Recently I held a Q150 community symposium with QSport on community sport and junior sport and looked at a range of things from costs and insurance to programs. I look forward to working on those in the future. We will look at the whole suite of programs. At this stage I will say that all core programs should be conducted but I do have the caveat that I am conducting a review as we speak.

Mr DEMPSEY: You mentioned volunteers. I agree that they are so very important to community sporting groups. How much is the state government spending on actually promoting volunteers within sport?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Obviously volunteers play a vitally important role in the sport and recreation industry. I do not get a chance to do it much these days. I was a volunteer in this regard. My involvement as a volunteer within the sport and recreation industry gave me the desire to make a difference in the community. As a result it gave me a reason to study in the sports area and ultimately have the great honour to be the Minister for Sport.

I am strongly committed to building the volunteer base in community sport. They are the lifeblood of sport. About one-eight or 12 per cent of Queenslanders aged 18 years and over volunteer for sport and recreational organisations. A reduction in the number of volunteers would directly impact on the ability of many clubs to provide services and affect participation rates.

Volunteering is a key priority of Toward Q2. The government target is to increase by 50 per cent the proportion of Queenslanders who volunteer. Key volunteering initiatives supported by the department include funding for education and training projects for 505 clubs. There is about

\$1.983 million for the club development program. For example, the Loganholme soccer club received \$4,000 to provide training and accreditation to 20 of its coaches. Redlands rugby union and recreation received \$3,800.

There were opportunities for 2,100 teacher aides, sports volunteers, tertiary students and community sport members to access nationally recognised Sport and Recreation awards. You might remember receiving a kit from the previous minister regarding valuing volunteers in sports and recreation. When I became minister I also asked MPs to nominate recognised people—one person from each electorate. A committee comprised of staff from QSport and Sport and Recreation picked the top 8 in that regard. Those people are going to be brought together at the end of this year for a sensational event. I look forward to meeting those great volunteers, because this industry needs volunteers. In the last session I talked about the great volunteers who are foster and kinship carers, but I also commend all of the mums and dads and people who volunteer day after day, particularly over the weekends and at training after school, who are providing great sports and recreation services. Without them, our children and young people would not be getting the sport and recreation that they need to keep our healthy state and our sporting record going.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Minister, in your opening statement the comment was made regarding the government's support for elite athletes, and Gladstone is a great sporting area. I wonder whether you will review the funding for artificial turf when a lot of our hockey players have been told that they are not picked for state and national squads because they lack experience on artificial turf.

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I can understand the issue that the member for Gladstone raises. I should say that Gladstone Hockey applied for funding under the Major Facilities Program. We issued about \$31.9 million for that program. There were 140 applicants and 39 were approved. As a consequence, 98 were not approved, and I should add that that \$30 million was a record amount of money from the major sports facilities funding. Just like in sport, there are winners and losers. Unfortunately, we cannot fund everyone. I would love to, but I want to make sure that we have our priorities right, and that is why I mentioned in the last session that we have a \$638 million budget for Child Safety and \$142 million for Sport and Recreation. I think that that shows that we have our priorities right, which is contrary to the member for Bundaberg's press release.

The Gladstone and District Hockey Association requested \$600,000 for the construction of international turf. The organisation was not invited to proceed to stage 2 for the following reasons. There was no information detailing how different groups would be allowed to use the facility, although the club has indicated that it is considering social hockey and potentially other user groups, although none were consulted to allow community access outside the regular hockey season. Land tenure was not confirmed. Although the applicant and the council did indicate that a 20-year lease was forthcoming, it was not received in the application. Finally, other funding contributions had not been confirmed for the project.

If you can understand, we have to make decisions to ensure that these projects are going to go ahead in the time frame. If those things were not confirmed, the likelihood of them going ahead in the time frames would be highly questionable. The situation is that if we only had 39 applicants for \$31 million we could work with the association. However, the departmental officers who put up the recommendations to me had to make the decisions based on the 140 applicants. They looked at the applicants that were ready, that had the need, that had the funding, that had the land tenure and all of that confirmed. As a direct result, unfortunately, 98 projects were not approved. I ask Gladstone Hockey to work with the Gladstone council and the local Sport and Recreation officers so that when this program comes up again it will be ready and able to put in another application.

Mr DEMPSEY: Minister, at page 27 of the Capital Statement the government states that it is committed to a grant of \$10 million to Stadiums Queensland as well as a \$55 million pledge. Considering there is an \$80 million deficit for stadiums over the last decade, what is the projected loss for Stadiums Queensland, bearing in mind the importance of stadiums to the whole economy of Queensland?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question, and I am glad he put that caveat on there. I know that he has a strong interest in stadiums. The reality is that \$58.7 million is the total capital grant for the whole of Sport and Recreation, not Stadiums Queensland.

Mr DEMPSEY: Okay.

Mr REEVES: Stadiums Queensland's capital grant was \$10 million. So the total capital grant was \$10 million. The reality is that Stadiums Queensland as an authority puts out an annual report every year with its profit and loss statements. It will not include that information for individual stadiums as some within the media want it to do because we want to keep our competitive edge. The attracting of major events is a really competitive industry. We have seen the success of Queensland in just the last month alone attracting major events to our stadiums such as Fulham playing against Gold Coast United on the Gold Coast, Celtic playing the Roar with 31,000 people and the first ever NRL double-header which attracted 50,000-odd people.

So you can honestly see the great work that it does. Putting in separate profit and losses of each venue will mean that our competitors—our interstate rivals, many of which are owned privately—will take away our competitive edge. I and the Queensland government are not going to allow that to happen. We are very proud of our success in that regard. In fact, from 9 July to 17 July we attracted over 350,000 spectators to Queensland events. When you consider that that was over eight days as part of the Q150 Festival of Sport when one of the highlights of the sporting calendar, the Australian Open, gets about 600,000 people over 14 days, that is an excellent result and it just shows how valuable to the economy the staging of major sporting events is. We can do that because of the investment we have made in stadiums and into facilities like the Reid Park complex at Townsville for the V8s.

CHAIR: The time for questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Everton.

Mr WATT: Minister, I note that page 3-2 of the SDS refers to the creation of the new Department of Communities, of which Sport and Recreation is a part. Can the minister outline the benefits of the inclusion of Sport and Recreation in this department and any synergies between the agency streams of Child Safety Services and Sport and Recreation?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question and I hope the member for Bundaberg listens very closely so that he can see where my priorities are. There is nothing more important in a child's early years than being raised in a functional and happy environment. One of the benefits of having an expanded Department of Communities has been the opportunity for Sport and Recreation to work closely with Child Safety Services to better target programs and services to support young people at risk. One example of the synergies between Child Safety and Sport and Recreation is departmental efforts to focus our children and young people strategy resources to enhance the One Chance at Childhood project. The aim of the One Chance at Childhood project initiative is to enhance safety, wellbeing and permanency outcomes for babies and toddlers subject to departmental intervention.

The children and young people strategy also targets this age group using a suite of practical programs, workshops and resources to help teachers, parents and early childhood carers to get more Queensland children active. Both initiatives are trying to ensure that children get as a reliable start in life as possible. Resources like *Move Baby Move*, *Let's Get Moving* and *Active Alphabet* for toddlers are just a few of the great resources that Sport and Recreation has been able to share with Child Safety Services in delivering these programs. These are great successful resources. Some 36,000 hard copies of these two resources have been distributed across Queensland over the last year and more than 186,000 have been provided free of charge since its inception. In fact, I visited a very close friend of mine and my wife's in Townsville the other day who has just had a baby—the baby is less than a week old—and on her coffee table was *Move Baby Move*. So these have gone the length and breadth of Queensland.

These resources have also been used in other states and territories and even exported to England, Scotland and New Zealand. These resources have been used in homes, child-care and play groups and family groups. Health professionals have used *Move Baby Move* as a key resource in professional practices working with new mothers. These professionals have said that it is the first time they have heard the mother singing to their children because they have used the resources in *Move Baby Move*. *Move Baby Move* and *Active Alphabet* build on the theme of parents and carers learning together to develop motor skills using everyday activities and items around the house at play. Carers and foster-parents will be able to use *Active Alphabet* and fun games as a vehicle to help forge those all-important bonds with children.

As a further example of the work of Child Safety and Sport and Recreation, when I visited the Beenleigh Child Safety Services office—if the questioner will give me an extension of time for this, I would appreciate it.

CHAIR: Does the questioner allow an extension of time?

Mr WATT: Yes.

Mr REEVES: Those young people getting ready to transition from care—those who are 16 and 17 who will be out of care when they turn 18—were going on a camp. Their support groups were saying that they were having difficulties trying to find different things to do in camp and different mentors that they could get. I was able to link them to one of Sport and Recreation's staff being Steve Renouf, who was able to attend the camp as well as take some other sportspeople along. That just shows you that good link. From all reports, that camp was very successful because they had those mentors within Sport and Recreation and Child Safety Services. Over the next year or two I look forward to having those synergies even closer together because, let us face it, if we can get our most vulnerable children and young people involved in sport and recreation that is going to improve their quality of life and improve their development. I look forward to doing that even further over the next few years to come.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, page 3-8 of the Service Delivery Statement refers to the work the department is doing to support the development of the sport and recreation industry. I understand the minister hosted a conference last week with QSport to look at the cost of junior sport. What feedback was received at the conference?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. It is an important part of the Bligh government's *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* vision for Queenslanders to become Australia's healthiest people. Encouraging our young people to get involved in sport is one of the best ways to achieve this goal. Sports teaches our children important values and life skills including self-confidence, teamwork, communication, inclusion, discipline, respect and fair play. By giving children something fun to focus on, we will reduce the likelihood of antisocial behaviour.

In the current era of financial uncertainty, many families are grappling to make ends meet. Some families are making hard choices about whether they can afford to keep their kids in sport. The Bligh government is achieving on its commitments to Queenslanders by providing affordable opportunities for Queensland's children to participate in sport and recreation. Over 170 representatives of sport and recreation organisations, members of the community and local government attended a Q150 community sports symposium held here at Parliament House this month. The symposium helped to generate a number of ideas about how we can work with industry to keep down the costs of junior sport.

One of the three symposium workshops specifically focused on the cost of participation in junior sport. Some of the points raised in this workshop included the fact that in some cases fee structures can be overly complex and not transparent to enable parents to clearly determine the total costs. Requiring parents to pay fees up-front can be a burden on parents, especially when more than one child plays sport in the family, and paying fees by instalments should be offered, especially when registration fees, deadlines and competition commitments are months apart. Offering concessions for children's registration if parents volunteer at the clubs should be considered in some clubs as a mechanism to keep club operating costs low.

An organisation should focus on or emphasise the quality of service provided rather than working to reduce the costs of participation to ensure that families receive value for money for the experience. Other workshops and symposiums covered topics including attracting, training and retaining volunteers in community sport, enhancing the long-term viability of community sport through sustainable planning and maximising facility usage.

At the end of the symposium, I agreed to work with the sport and recreation industry to look at developing a new suite of resources that will be available online for clubs and associations to attract, develop and retain volunteers and club officials; establish a linkage service which connects people who are looking to volunteer with the relevant sporting club; an audit of state owned sports and recreation clubs, including school sporting facilities, to determine what is available and where there are opportunities for their better utilisation by community sporting organisations; investigating opportunities with state sporting organisations to establish sport-wide maintenance strategies for community facilities; exploring whether core participants and equipment should be eligible for funding as part of a review of our funding of programs; and supporting the establishment of equipment libraries and equipment share schemes on a regional and district basis.

This symposium covered some great ideas and I want to see them through. I congratulate the 170 participants. It was a terrific day and I thank all the speakers who volunteered, including a range of people like Leigh Matthews, Tony Shaw, Shane Webcke and Natalie Cook, who was sensational in her presentation. They volunteered to come and make presentations. I also thank Richard Champion for emceeing the event.

Mr RYAN: Minister, last year the Premier launched *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* outlining a new vision for Queensland's future. Page 3-3 of the SDS refers to the department's contribution to the fair and healthy targets set out in this document. Minister, could you outline the actions taken by Sport towards achieving these goals.

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. Under the Bligh government's *Toward Q2: Tomorrow's Queensland* priorities, we are committed to making Queenslanders Australia's healthiest people. One of the challenges we face as a community today is increasing obesity levels. Under *Toward Q2*, we aim to reduce obesity rates by one-third by 2020.

Another *Toward Q2* target that the government has identified is a 50 per cent increase in the proportion of Queenslanders involved in their communities as volunteers by 2020. The Bligh government is delivering on these commitments through its investment in sport and recreation, which is greater than that which any other state or territory makes. Can I just repeat that: our investment in sport and recreation is greater than that which any other state or territory makes.

In 2008-09, Sport and Recreation services contributed to these targets by delivering the first phase of the Find Your 30 campaign, providing simple messages on how to find 30 minutes of daily physical activity and make healthy food choices; contributing over \$35 million towards the development of community sport and recreation facilities across Queensland; releasing the Valuing Volunteers in

Sport and Recreation kit to encourage local recognition of the contribution of volunteers to the sport and recreation industry; and committing \$3.3 million to support 115 local projects under the community partnerships program to encourage participation in physical activity and making healthy food choices.

In 2009-10 and future years, Sport and Recreation services will contribute to healthy and fair targets by conducting sport and recreation volunteer research to gain a greater understanding of attitudes, motivations and behaviours of volunteers in the sport and recreation industry; delivering the Get Active Queensland Accreditation Program—level 1 accreditation workshops for teachers and teacher aides; delivering Building Active Communities workshops to develop the knowledge of Queensland sport and recreation volunteers in areas of relevance; providing \$1 million a year to support the Healthy Queensland Awards, developing practical guidelines to improve healthy food and drink choices provided by local sporting clubs and associations; continuing the delivery of Find Your 30, an integrated social marketing campaign; and committing over \$53 million in grants to develop facilities, programs and services for Queenslanders to participate in sport and recreation. The delivery of these initiatives will be monitored quarterly and the initiatives will be reviewed annually.

We all know there are many benefits to community participation in sport, including social interaction, social inclusion, a feeling of community involvement as well as the health benefits associated with physical activity. Sport and recreation plays an enriching role in people's lives. The programs that I have outlined are yet more examples of the Bligh government delivering on its commitments to Queenslanders to help get people active and involved in their communities.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. Earlier this month Townsville hosted its inaugural V8 Supercar race—an event with respect to which the people of Cairns were very generous in their praise. Page 3-16 of the SDS refers to the government's contribution to the infrastructure required to make the event a reality. Can you advise the committee what the state government's role in the event was and the benefits of making this kind of investment?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know he enjoyed asking that question because of the great outcome the V8 Supercars had for North Queensland and Far North Queensland.

The Bligh government is proud to have been the major contributor in what has been the absolute roaring success of the Dunlop Townsville 400. The inaugural event this month exceeded all expectations, with V8 Supercars Australia citing attendance of almost 170,000 people over the three days of the event. The Bligh government was the largest contributor to the construction cost of the event precinct, providing \$14.61 million of the \$29.58 million funding for the Reid Park precinct to be developed into a temporary motor racing circuit and the open community recreation space for other times of the year. We are also providing funding of \$2.5 million each year for the next five years to support the annual V8 Supercar Championship Series in Townsville. Our support for the event is another way the Bligh government is delivering on its commitments to create jobs and boost the Queensland economy during these difficult financial times. Everyone involved should be congratulated on a job well done. It was a sensational event.

I am pleased to confirm that construction was completed on time to support the inaugural event and featured a 2.85 kilometre track and a new bridge over Ross Creek. In addition, Townsville will enjoy the ongoing benefits of the multipurpose pit building and the landscaped Reid Park precinct for many years to come. By way of jobs, the construction of the Reid Park precinct is estimated to have generated 130 full-time equivalent jobs and staging the event is estimated to have generated up to 180 full-time equivalent jobs. At a time of economic uncertainty, local businesses have strongly benefited from the construction, with nearly 80 per cent of the construction works awarded to local contractors. The staging of the event has also provided a huge boost to the Townsville economy. Townsville Enterprise has estimated that the event generated between \$25 million and \$28 million for the North Queensland region. While this claim is yet to be assessed, it surpasses the \$10 million return that was predicted.

In addition to the substantial benefits from the construction project, Townsville and the North Queensland region received national and international exposure from the telecast of the event. V8 Supercars advises that the event was broadcast to 110 countries. This resulted in Tourism Queensland messages broadcast throughout the world. I must really say thank you to the 400 people who volunteered to make the event such a success. There is no doubt that this event is an exciting addition to the Queensland sporting calendar. I had the great pleasure of being up there for a couple of days and the buzz in Townsville was amazing. Prior to the event, I must say I was not the greatest motor racing fan, but I can understand why nearly 170,000 people got hooked on it. I reckon next year it will be even bigger and better. It is great that a city like Townsville can host such a great event. That is because governments—local, state and federal—worked together and brought that project to fruition. I also thank Tony Cochrane and the whole V8 team for an excellent job.

Mr WATT: Minister, we are nearing the end of the Q150 Festival of Sport, which both your department and Tourism Queensland have been promoting. Page 3-8 of the SDS states that the Department of Communities will continue to position Queensland as a premier sporting destination. Can you outline any initiatives to achieve this goal?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know the member is a strong Lions fan and hopefully he will be there to watch them beat the Kangaroos on Saturday evening. The Bligh government is proud of its record and its role in attracting major sporting events, which reap significant economic and social benefits for Queensland. For example, throughout July Queensland hosted some of the biggest games on the NRL, the AFL and A-League calendars and the Dunlop Townsville 400 V8 Supercars, which I just mentioned, during the Q150 Festival of Sport.

As I said, almost 170,000 fans attended the Townsville 400 alone, and many thousands more local, interstate and overseas fans were united in Queensland during this period, contributing significantly to our economy in these tough financial times. As I mentioned in my previous answer, Townsville Enterprise estimates that the V8 Supercar race generated \$25 million to \$28 million for the local economy. The Q150 Festival of Sport was a strong partnership of sport and tourism and we worked closely with Tourism Queensland, Ticketek and Stadiums Queensland to maximise exposure of our festival and Queensland to national and international markets.

Two nights of Rugby League within three days alone attracted more than 100,000 spectators to Suncorp Stadium, with the Canterbury Bulldogs bringing their home game to Queensland as part of the historic double-header and attracting a larger audience than they would have in Sydney. The only downside of that was that all the Queensland sides lost, but I am sure we will make amends this week. I am sure even the member for Bundaberg would agree with me on that one.

Outside the Q150 Festival of Sport, Queensland has hosted many other major events over the past few years, including the World Cup, the Bledisloe Cup, Tri-Nations and international rugby matches; international test and one-day cricket matches; State of Origin and Rugby League World Cup matches; motor sport; and FIFA World Cup qualifying football matches. A key plank in positioning Queensland as a premier sporting destination is providing world-class facilities to host major events. Through Stadiums Queensland, the Queensland government owns and operates the state's major sporting facilities, including Suncorp Stadium, which is arguably one of the world's best rectangular stadiums.

In January 2009, the Premier officially opened the \$82 million Queensland Tennis Centre, which immediately put Queensland back on the international tennis scene, with the staging of the inaugural Brisbane international men's and women's hard court championships. In March this year, the Premier announced that the Queensland government will invest \$60 million in the Gold Coast Stadium at Carrara, which will be the home ground for the new Gold Coast AFL team from 2011. The Bligh government is delivering on its election commitment with the delivery of the Gold Coast Stadium and is pleased to position Queensland as a premier sporting destination. In terms of sport promotion, I remember Tony Cochrane talking about it up in Townsville. He believes the Queensland government stands second to none in this country when promoting events and promoting stadiums and having first-class sporting facilities along the length and breadth of Queensland. I think the record shows that.

Mrs SCOTT: Minister, page 3-3 of the SDS states that Sport and Recreation services will support Queenslanders affected by natural disasters and other crises. Can the minister give examples of assistance provided to our sporting communities following the severe weather Queensland has experienced over the past 12 months?

Mr REEVES: I thank the honourable member for the question. One of the highest priorities for communities when recovering from the effects of a natural disaster, such as a severe storm or flooding, is to get their sport and recreation facilities back up and running as quickly as possible. With that in mind, the Bligh government has put in place the Sport and Recreation Disaster Assistance Program to assist communities affected by storms and flooding.

Under the program, financial support is available for the replacement of damaged equipment of up to \$5,000 and repairs to affected infrastructure of up to \$20,000. This is on the back of the support that we provided to the communities affected by Cyclone Larry in March 2006 and areas of Central Queensland affected by severe flooding in January 2008. We also provided support to those in the south-east, the south-west and the central areas of Queensland in November 2008 who were hit hard by bad storms.

I am pleased to advise that in 2008-09, 230 organisations across Queensland were approved funding, totalling \$2.2 million, to assist with recovery from major floods, storms and other severe climatic events through the Flood Recovery and Sport and Recreation Disaster Assistance programs. The clubs are provided assistance quickly to alleviate the costs of repairs and help with the recovery process. Without this assistance, sport and recreation activities may take significantly longer to be re-established in communities, delaying the opportunities for people, particularly children and young people, to resume playing sport.

I reopened the program on 21 May 2009 to assist those clubs in the south-east that were affected by that torrential rain and flooding on 19 and 20 May 2009. An additional \$1 million in funding has been allocated to assist these organisations. The program closed on 17 July 2009, with funding provided as soon as applications were assessed.

Some examples of assistance that has been provided are \$20,000 to the Blackwater Pony Club to repair fencing—and the former member for that area is in the gallery, so I am sure he would be happy about that; \$25,000 to the Ipswich Knights to repair the soccer field and clubhouse and replace equipment; \$25,000 to the Brothers Sports and Community Club at Ingham to repair two multisporting fields; \$25,000 to the North Cairns Australian Football and Sporting Club Limited to replace their washing machine, freezer and fridge and to repair the surface of the oval and perimeter fence; and \$21,250 to Sedan Dip Sports and Recreation club at Julia Creek—and I have been to Julia Creek and it is a great place—to repair extensive erosion to the rodeo grounds and to replace a damaged water tank and floodlight. I have actually been to the rodeo grounds so I am glad we are putting in that money so that the club can run its annual Dirt and Dust Festival. Further, \$20,000 has been provided to the Normanton Bowls Club—and I will be in Normanton next Wednesday night, so I might go and check this out—to repair the base and replace the existing synthetic surface of the lawn bowls green at Normanton. This is another example where, despite these tough economic times, the Bligh government is committed to providing funding to programs for Queenslanders in their time of need, regardless of where they live.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Sport. Thank you, Minister, and officers for your attendance. The committee has also concluded its consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the Queensland parliament website within approximately two hours. On behalf of the committee, I thank Hansard officers, timekeepers and the parliamentary attendants for their assistance today.

Mr REEVES: I would like to thank the committee for their questions, even the member for Bundaberg. But I would particularly like to thank the DG and staff of the Department of Communities and the staff of Sport and Recreation, who have not only supported me here today but have put in many of hours of work, sometimes late into the night, to prepare information for the estimates hearing so that the committee has the information that it requires to prepare its report. As this is the last estimates for 2009, I too would like to thank all the attendants, Hansard and parliamentary officials and staff who do a terrific job year after year. I am sure they are relieved like most of us—probably more than most of us—that this is the conclusion. I have had the pleasure of being here for the last hearing. Thank you very much.

Mrs CUNNINGHAM: Chair, I would like to endorse your thanks and the minister's thanks to everybody. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your oversight of the committee and your very fair and even-handed apportionment of time.

Mr DEMPSEY: And patience.

CHAIR: Thank you very much. With those kind remarks, I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee G closed.

Committee adjourned at 5.16 pm